

A LOCAL CHURCH PLAN FOR HELPING A PERSON
RECOGNIZE AND CONFIRM THEIR
CALL TO MINISTRY

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To
Dr. Al Jackson
for 40 years of demonstrating
a high priority on helping others recognize and confirm their
call to vocational ministry.

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To God our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, be all glory.

ABSTRACT

This project aims to develop a plan for how a local church can help a person recognize and confirm their call to vocational ministry. The discernment process for determining a person's call to vocational ministry involves both inward/private and outward/public activity. This project looks to identify those outward/public elements that are helpful in the discernment process and to intentionally create a culture of call in the local church environment. The author of this project believes that greater numbers of people will be obedient to the call of God to vocational ministry if the spiritual leadership of the church is actively involved in watching for those that demonstrate evidence of the call of God on their life and engaging them in intentional discipleship toward ministry leadership.

The plan is developed primarily from information gleaned from interviews with twenty-five vocational ministers. Answers that describe ways outside influence helped them discern their call to ministry is organized into a process labeled Discerning Ministry as a Vocation which includes four specific actions on behalf of spiritual influencers in a person's community of faith: intentionality, opportunities, accessibility, and affirmation.

CHAPTER 1

THE PROBLEM AND SETTING

How does a person know that God has called him to a life of vocational ministry? Does that decision rest solely with the individual? Is calling something hammered out just between a person and the voice of God? When Paul identified himself in Romans 1:1 as one “called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God” and again in 1 Corinthians 1:1 as one “called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God”, did the will of God unfold privately and inwardly exclusively for Paul, or was there some public and outward influence and involvement as well? If there are some public and outward influencers on the call to ministry, what and who might they be? For the scope of this project the question is what role, if any, does the local church and a person’s community of faith play in helping a person recognize and confirm a call to vocational ministry?

The church where this author pastors, Watkinsville First Baptist, is located 10 minutes from the heart of the University of Georgia’s campus. Thirty-three thousand students are enrolled at this state university. About five hundred of those students attend one of the worship services at WFBC each weekend. Faces change from week to week. Hundreds of different students will attend at least once in a school year. Most of these students already have a personal relationship with Jesus when they arrive at the church’s front door.¹ Deep down they are each asking

¹ This information is based on guest cards, counted attendance, attendance patterns, and the weekly experience of meeting and interacting with new students regardless of what time of year in the school calendar.

similar questions, “What is it God wants me to do with the rest of my life?” “Why am I here?” “What is my purpose for being alive?” and “What is God’s will for my life?”

The answers to those questions become as much a part of their college experience as any question they face on various course exams. With every new semester they are making decisions about the future and how they will spend their life. The opportunity to invest in lives at the point of such huge life decisions is both a rich and, in a selfish way, sad experience. The experience is rich because of the privilege of having some input into whom they are becoming as a wholehearted follower of Christ, but sad because they will not be staying. The sadness is easily overcome, however, when a person grasps the weight of the description often given to WFBC: a river. This river of people, college students, constantly runs through the body of WFBC ideally picking up a great love for the local church and taking this passion down the line to the next place they land and live. For a season the students come, connect, grow, and serve but soon leave for the next chapter of their life.

Many of the departing students express, in some venue, how, over time, they have answered those life questions referred to earlier. They talk about taking jobs with certain companies. They talk about going on to law school or medical school. They talk about going back home to work in a family business. Occasionally, a student will mention something ministry-related but this is the rarest of answers. Among the mix of life choices for the future, few mention that they believe God has called them to vocational ministry, and even more rare is the one who believes God has called him to pastor.

In an environment where such a large number of people are making career decisions, how could so few be considering a life of vocational ministry? In a world where the need for the Gospel is so desperate, how could so few be taking up that call? In the denominational world of a Southern Baptist church where the trumpet to start new churches is blown regularly, how could so few be responding to the call to preach and pastor?

I have a conviction that there is a divine call to vocational ministry and a public dimension to discerning the call. As a result, the scarcity of those who mention a life given to vocational ministry on “their way out the door” has raised a question in the heart of this author and pastor: What role does a community of faith play in helping a person recognize and confirm the call of God on his life for vocational ministry? Could the problem be that the students’ local community of faith has not focused their vision on seeing a new generation of pastors and preachers and a multitude of other vocational ministers called out? Is the church leadership missing a crucial target for discipleship? Could pastors be responsible for a few “dropped calls?”

As the author explored the role of outward influence on a call to ministry, he discovered that some people only needed that encouraging “nudge” from their local church to confidently believe God was calling. One example is B.K. B.K. is the most passionate lady in her church regarding missions. A person who gets close to her begins to wonder fairly rapidly where the fuel for this passion is derived. When asked about her inspiration, she refers to her college days. Now in her 60s, she reflects on a season in her life when she sensed God may have been calling her to a

career in missions. With a twinge of sadness, she recalls that when she mentioned those thoughts around her church family as a student, “nothing ever happened. No one encouraged me. If someone might have helped me....” Those types of “dropped calls” may just rest at the feet of a community of believers. Maybe the church is not seeing what others are hearing—or maybe the church is just not looking at all.

Pastors that have served for a number of years often report on what they have seen God do in their ministry locations. Those reports include many measurable items such as number of baptisms, number of sermons preached, number of construction projects they have survived, and maybe even the number of different locations of service. One report that stands out among a few of those pastors is the number of people who are currently serving in vocational ministry who were once under the pastor’s influence.²

When those numbers are reported (people serving in vocational ministry), a person has to wonder, why from that church and ministry and not another church in the same area? Was there something going on in the church formally or informally that led to seemingly unusual numbers of people answering “the call.” This question is especially pertinent to this author when those pastors have served in similar fields as WFBC: places with that river of college students winding through the church family.

Another dynamic that heightens the possibility of a local church’s role in a person’s call relates to the presence and effectiveness of para-church ministries in

² A deduction from informal research in settings where pastors are introduced in speaking environments, conversations with other pastors describing the influence of various churches and their spiritual leadership along with the study of biographies and biographical sketches.

reproducing leaders. As is usually the case around college towns like where WFBC is located, there are a large number of para-church ministries operating in and around the campus of UGA. Groups such as Campus Crusade, Fellowship of Christian Athletes, Campus Outreach, and Navigators are often very singular in purpose, targeting specific areas of ministry such as evangelism or discipleship. In their laser-like focus, they also have shown great success in recruiting, training, and facilitating those who might “join staff” with one of their groups after their college days.

In fact, as students prepare for college graduation at UGA, many of those who have demonstrated great faith, lived lives of conviction while students, and have been faithful in attendance at WFBC, will report they have decided to go “on staff” for a season with the para-church group they were influenced by while a student. Each time this is reported, a person should rejoice knowing that the Gospel will be carried intentionally to more of the world by this person.³ On the other hand, the author also wonders where is the person or persons who will walk up at the end of their college days and say he believes God has called him to serve the local church as a pastor or preacher or some other church ministry role as a vocation.

The author is convinced that the local church cannot wait for people to walk up to her and say they have been called. There must be a “intentionality”, not unlike the focus of a para-church ministry, to our discipleship of a next generation of “called out” ones for church ministry. Could the issue of so few answering the call to

³ This author is aware that on occasion a person may start a vocation serving in a para-church ministry and later discern that God has called them to serve vocationally in a local church setting.

church ministry be that we, the leaders in our church, have not walked up to them, that we have not had our eyes trained to spot those God is speaking to about vocational ministry? Could the problem be that we, the leaders of WFBC, have not created an environment for people to explore and experience ministry, specifically ministry that would lead to a vocation?

This author believes that the local church does indeed play a role in helping a person recognize and confirm his call to ministry. This paper will set out to develop both an informal and formal environment within the ministry of WFBC to give people the chance to more clearly hear God calling, and if they do, to create an environment where that call is nurtured, encouraged and affirmed almost simultaneously.

Immediately, one may think that these questions are not for humans to solve. Certainly, God *is* sovereign by nature, and nowhere is this more evident than in His will for a person's life. The idea of "calling" and the actual meaning of the word raise a number of issues. Also, the idea that there may be both a private or inward call as well as a public or outward call is one that needs to be discussed. In Chapter 2 the Biblical and theological issues related to the concept of "called to ministry" will be explored.

For now, the author is making the assumption that God *does* call people to a life of vocational ministry *and* that the call to ministry is *not* totally an inward or private decision. The author believes there is also an outward and public dimension to the call to ministry. Others often play a major role in a person's recognition of a

call as will later be discussed using both Biblical examples of calling and the personal experience of those serving in vocational ministry today.

A person might ask, is having some certainty about a call to serve the Lord in vocational ministry that crucial? Might a person not just go try a “job” out and see how the work goes? However, the importance of a person knowing he is called to vocational ministry when he is serving in this role down the road is hard to overstate. A long history of the life stories of ministers of the Gospel illustrate again and again that the steel that strengthened and sustained him was a confident sense of calling—both privately discovered and publically confirmed.

Though the reference material about calling to vocational ministry is not abundant, many books on pastoring or ministering in and through the church usually begin right at the point of calling. These resources identify that all else seems futile and the shelf life of a minister will be short if, at the very beginning, a sense of call is not established. These resources will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3 as a literature review on the subject of calling.

Using the method of survey analysis, this author will interview pastors to determine what elements of their environment led so many people to answer the call to ministry. Questions will be asked of five pastors with the purpose being to discover what they did or did not do to create an environment that helped people discern the call to vocational ministry. They may have no grasp themselves that they played a recognizing and confirming role, but something as simple as moving a person toward licensing and ordination may have weighed significantly on a sense of call in countless lives.

Also, those who are currently serving in full-time ministry will be interviewed to discover the ways that the local church contributed to their recognizing and confirming their call. The plan is to ask identical questions of twenty vocational ministers in order to glean information about the outward aspect of their call. The author believes that many, if not all, will have some piece of their story that is tied to an outward or public act which helped clarify their call. They may actually realize for the first time that the outward and public act of a local community of faith served as one of the earliest indicators that God was getting their attention.

With the survey results from these two groups, a plan will be developed and implemented that will weave into the fabric of WFBC those characteristics that lead to people recognizing and confirming their call to vocational local church ministry in greater numbers. Though the time frame of this project will not measure whether the numbers of those entering vocational ministry increase (compared to previous years), the intention of this project is to learn lessons from those that have seen a number of people answer the call under their ministry as well as from those who have answered the call. Those lessons will then be combined with ideas for the unique environment of WFBC in an attempt to create better vision and intentionality, leading the church to a position of simultaneously *seeing* what God is *saying* to the hearts of people. The desired result will be many more answered calls and the absence of “dropped calls.”

CHAPTER 2

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Does the Bible support the idea of a person being called to vocational ministry? Is a call to vocational ministry a cultural idea, a denominational idea, or a biblical idea? And, even more specifically, for the purpose of this project, is the idea of outward influence on or involvement in a person's call to vocational ministry a biblically-supported concept?

Before those questions can be addressed, a person must be clear on what is meant by the phrase "called to vocational ministry." This is a phrase that is not easily defined, nor consistently defined, in the Christian world. The difficulty of grasping the meaning of the phrase can be seen by the varying ways that just the word "called" is defined from writer to writer.

In the next chapter, several sources will be discussed in greater detail on how various writers address the idea of a "call" to ministry. Specifically what those sources of literature say about the outward call on a person's life will be addressed. However, note first how these different sources define "call" or "calling" as it relates to a person's life in order to understand how call is being used in Scripture.

Derek Prime and Alistair Begg say, "by call we mean the unmistakable conviction an individual possesses that God wants him to do a specific task." ¹ Os Guinness writes, "Calling is the truth that God calls us to himself so decisively that everything we are, everything we do, and everything we have is invested with a

¹ Alistair Begg and Derek Prime, *On Being a Pastor: Understanding Our Calling and Work*, (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2004), 18.

special devotion, dynamism, and direction lived out as a response to his summons and service.”²

Jeff Iorg says, “a call is a profound impression from God that establishes parameters for your life and can be altered only by a subsequent, superseding impression from God.”³ Another writer, Gary Barkalow explains in his book, *It’s Your Call*, that calling is a “weighty purpose in life.”⁴ Furthermore, in his classic devotional, *My Utmost for His Highest*, Oswald Chambers simply refers to a call on a person’s life as “a necessity laid upon him.”⁵

Difficulty with understanding “call” and “calling” is also due to the fact that the words are used in Scripture in different ways. Guinness points out that “calling” is used in four different ways biblically and the fourth way actually has two sub-categories.⁶

In Guinness’s thoughts, Scripture uses call in a common everyday communication kind of way, the way that any human would call out to another person. Secondly, call is used to name and create. He notes, “to call means to name, and to name means to call into being or to make. Thus, in the first chapter of Genesis, ‘God called the light “day” and the darkness he called “night.”’ Such decisive, creative naming is a form of making.”

² Os Guinness, *The Call: Finding and Fulfilling the Central Purpose of Your Life* (Nashville, TN: Word, 1998), 29.

³ Jeff Iorg, *Is God Calling Me? Answering the Question Every Believer Asks* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2008), 8.

⁴ Gary Barkalow, *It’s Your Call: What Are You Doing Here?* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2010), 33.

⁵ Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest* (New York, NY: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1935), 273.

⁶ Guinness, *The Call*, 29-31.

The third way Guinness sees call used in Scripture is as a synonym for salvation. Finally, the fourth way is the use of the word describing a summons to a particular task. Within this use he sees a primary call and a secondary call, primary being God's purpose for every Christian to follow Christ in discipleship, and secondary being to do certain tasks completely and wholeheartedly for Him. He actually sets this use of calling aside as "callings."⁷

Highlighting the inconsistent references in literature regarding the use of call, note in contrast Iorg's book that says, "the Bible uses the term in three distinct ways.... First, there is a universal call to Christian service for all believers. Second, there is a general call of some believers to ministry leadership, sometimes popularly (though incorrectly) equated with paid ministerial employment. Third, there is a specific call to a unique ministry assignment or a particular ministry position."⁸

Finally, consider H. Richard Niebuhr's description of four characteristics of calling as quoted by Alice Cullinan in her work titled *Sorting It Out*:

(1) the call to be a Christian, meaning to become a disciple of Jesus; (2) the secret call, defined as the experience of feeling "summoned or invited by God to take up the work of the ministry"; (3) the providential call, which is apparent when an individual's aptitudes, abilities, circumstances, and inner spiritual drive match the need; and (4) the ecclesiastical call, which comes from a specific church or institution, inviting an individual to serve there.⁹

One can see that writers agree that "call" is used in different ways but those particular ways are not consistently agreed upon.

⁷Guinness, *The Call*, 31.

⁸ Iorg, *Is God Calling Me?*, 17-18.

⁹ Alice R. Cullinan, *Sorting It Out: Discerning God's Call to Ministry* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1999), 5.

In conversation with a soon-to-be-agency appointed missionary, this author asked the candidate, “Has there been a time in your life when you sensed a definite call to ministry?” He responded by saying, “The idea of calling is something I am still wrestling with internally. What do you mean by a call?” This exchange illustrates some of the confusion and uncertainty often present in conversations with those in the early stages of discerning a call to vocational ministry. Even in this author’s mind I wondered where to start and with which definition.

The confusion and uncertainty over dealing with a call to ministry can be made clearer by addressing two basic and crucial questions: What is meant by the phrase “called to vocational ministry” and secondly, does the Bible support the concept of being called to ministry as a vocation? Consider these three major words individually: call, vocation, and ministry.

“Call” and its various forms are used in Scripture almost eight hundred times.¹⁰ The sheer number alone demonstrates the prominence of communication going on between man and God.

Call in the New Testament is used close to two hundred times in different ways and contexts. According to Henlee Barnette, “calling and its cognates are used almost two hundred times in the Gospels and Epistles. However, they have a specifically theological meaning in only about seventy of these instances. Paul employs these terms more than forty times in his writings.”¹¹

¹⁰ Edward W. Goodrick and John R. Kohlenberger eds., *The NIV Exhaustive Concordance* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990).

¹¹ Henlee Barnette, *Has God Called You?* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1969), 15.

The Greek word in the New Testament translated “call” is ‘kaleo.’ This word refers to action that God initiates, specifically in summoning individuals and groups. The word *kaleo* is used in reference to calls to salvation (1 Peter 2:9), calls to discipleship (1 Peter 1:15), and calls to specific work (1 Corinthians 1:1). When God “calls” he is making known information.¹² He is summoning, inviting, initiating, and as Chambers says, He “takes us into his purposes.”¹³ The picture of “call” is God reaching out to a person and making known to him His will for his life. The key point here is that God initiates and communicates information regarding his will and purposes.

The second word to consider is vocation. Vocation has different meanings depending on what time in history it was used. Vocation comes from the Latin word *vocare*, meaning “to call or summon.”¹⁴

In medieval times the word vocation was a reference to “full-time church work.” When a person was said to have a vocation, this was understood to mean specifically work as a priest or a nun or a monk.¹⁵

During the Reformation vocation came to mean far more than work as a priest or monk or nun. One dramatic effect of the Reformation was for people to come to a place where every job and task where one made his income was understood as a vocation as long as he did the work unto the Lord. Therefore, the

¹² Iorg, *Is God Calling Me?*, 17.

¹³ Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest*, 218.

¹⁴ Cullinan, *Sorting It Out*, 2.

¹⁵ Gene Edward Veith, Jr., *God At Work: Your Christian Vocation in All of Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, Books, 2002), 18.

work of a banker or a plumber was understood to be just as much of a vocation as a pastor or priest due to the impact of the Reformation and its teaching.¹⁶

In today's world, vocation has become commonly used in a much broader sense than even the days of the Reformation. When one speaks today about vocation, in any circle, the majority of people will equate the word simply as their occupation. It is their everyday job.

In the context of this project, the writer's environment and today's language, Webster's Student Dictionary offers the clearest and most pertinent understanding of the word "vocation". The definition being simply "a job a person feels called to."¹⁷

Combining "call" with vocation, the distinction here is that the call is not just a general call from God to salvation, but is actually a call from God to a person, for a task or to give an assignment. One example, again, would be Paul's references in Romans 1:1 and 1Corinthians1:1, where he describes himself as one "called to be an apostle."

The third word to consider is "ministry." This word in the New Testament is translated from *diakonia*, the Greek word meaning service. Cullinan's words are helpful at this point when she says, "The Greek term encompasses both service in a general, domestic sense as well as service in a spiritual and religious sense. Like the biblical understanding of calling, biblical reference to ministry involves the responsibility and work of all believers and the particular apostolic ministry of specific persons."¹⁸

¹⁶ Veith, *God At Work*, 20.

¹⁷ P. H. Collin, ed., *Webster's Student Dictionary*. American Edition, 1999.

¹⁸ Cullinan, *Sorting It Out*, 3.

Another impact of the Reformation was the development that any church person could be and should be a minister. That is, any follower of Christ could and should serve the Lord in some way with their life, regardless of whether he is supported financially or not, in that area of service. God gives to all believers spiritual gifts for spiritual service.

Moving forward in this attempt to understand calling and ministry, note that at the very core of the discussion, “call” is God acting on a person, moving him to a position of servanthood. This is illustrated in a person’s life by what Prime and Begg describe as, “the call usually begins with a desire to care for (serve) the spiritual well-being of others....”¹⁹

Stringing the meaning of these three words together--call, vocation, and ministry--this author understands and writes from this foundational definition: a call to vocational ministry is *God communicating to an individual His will to serve Him by serving others in a task focused on the spiritual needs, spiritual nurture, and spiritual development of another person or group of persons.* Therefore, “answering” a call to vocational ministry would be the *recognition* and *acceptance* of God’s will to serve Him by serving others in a task focused on the spiritual needs, spiritual nurture, and spiritual development of another person or group of persons. This call would be understood by the person to be a task that would be considered his life’s work. To reject this call would be seen as disobedience to God’s leadership in the person’s life.

¹⁹ Begg, *On Being a Pastor*, 22.

For the purposes of this project it is noteworthy to state again that it is at the point of recognition and confirmation of the call to vocational ministry upon which this study focuses. The question of how a local church can help a person recognize and confirm their call is the target.

Where in the Bible is this kind of call seen in the lives of those in fellowship with God? Where, if at all, do we see God calling and people responding to his call to serve Him by serving others in a task focused on their spiritual lives?

Look first to the Old Testament. There is the regular occurrence of God expressing his will to an individual, calling them to address some spiritual situation in the life of people. That person then is in a place of decision of whether to obey or disobey.

The Bible roll-call of heroes in the Old Testament shows person after person that God spoke to and summoned to a task. The very reason we know of these individuals is because of God calling him, they in turn recognizing God calling them, and finally obeying His call. In Genesis 6 the account of God speaking to Noah and giving him a task to do in order for God's judgment of sin to be carried out is recorded. "So God said to Noah, 'I am going to put an end to all people, for the earth is filled with violence because of them. I am surely going to destroy both them and the earth. So make yourself an ark of cypress wood....Noah did everything just as God commanded him'" (13-14,22). Also, Abraham was called by God to leave his land and go to a new one in order for God to establish a great nation of God's choosing. "The Lord had said to Abram, 'Leave your country, your people and your

father's household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you....' So Abram left, as the LORD had told him" (12:1-2,4a).

In Exodus 3 there is the well-known account of God calling Moses to lead his people out of slavery in Egypt and to the land of promise through the burning bush experience. Moses argued with God in the beginning but eventually followed God's call.

In Joshua the record is given of God calling Joshua to lead the children of Israel after Moses' death. Moses was identified as "the servant of the LORD" in Joshua 1:1 and Joshua would get this description in the end. In 24:29 he is called the servant of the Lord. This is important because one who is called by the Lord is responding to a call to service.

The book of Judges demonstrates God's call to a task of service in the life of Gideon (6:11-27) and Samson (13:1-25). Samuel was called by God to be a prophet for his people according to 1 Samuel 3. King Saul was called by God to serve according to 1 Samuel 9-11 and King David was called by God as His anointed one according to 1 Samuel 16:1-13.

Other accounts in the Old Testament tell of God calling prophets such as Elisha (1 Kings 19:16, 19-21), Isaiah (Isaiah 6:1-9), Jeremiah (1:1-10), and Ezekiel (2:1-3). Then also, there was Jonah, called by God to go to Ninevah and preach against their sin. He famously refused the call initially by fleeing to Tarshish. His actions established the first example of what has been referred to in a number of religious circles as "running from the call." His eventual obedience to God's call has also led to the often referred to phrase "surrendering to the call" (Jonah 1:1-3).

In the New Testament God's will for the lives of different individuals is also seen through the act of God calling. This is seen in the work of Jesus when he calls the twelve disciples to follow him. They are then called at a later time to serve Him as apostles (Matthew 4:18-20, 9:9-13; Mark 1:16-20, 3:13-18; Luke 5:1-11; John 1:35-51).

After the ascension of Christ the call to vocational ministry is fleshed out in ways that support and serve local churches through the preaching, teaching and spreading of the Gospel. In the book of Acts there is the account of Paul being called by God to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles (9:1-16). Paul restates this call and his understanding of it on various occasions such as Romans 1:1 where he states, "Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God," and in I Corinthians 1:1 where again he states, "Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God...."

Timothy serves as a pastor to the church at Ephesus and according to letters written to him by Paul, Timothy had received a call from God placed on him by prophecy. Paul wrote, "Timothy, my son, I give you this instruction in keeping with the prophecies once made about you...."(1 Timothy 1:18), and "Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through a prophetic message when the body of elders laid their hands on you"(1 Timothy 4:14).

The New Testament has not only examples of those called to ministry as a vocation, but also states qualifications for service (1 Timothy 3:1-7), instructions for service (1 Peter 5:1-4) and means of provision while in service (1 Corinthians

9:14). The implication being that there are those that will be in roles of service in the church in vocational and occupational ways.

Another indicator of God's work of calling individuals to serve the spiritual lives of others, as noted by Doug Brown in his article "The Call to Ministry", is that "God used Paul to appoint elders in newly planted churches on his first missionary journey (Acts 14:23) and he exhorted both Timothy and Titus to establish qualified elders in Ephesus (1 Timothy 3:1-7; 5:17-22) and Crete (Titus 1:5-9)."²⁰

In light of the fact that this project is addressing a local church plan to help a person recognize and confirm his call to ministry, is that involvement biblical? Does God use outward and public influence in discerning a call to vocational ministry? Is there a role for pastors and families of faith to play in the process of assisting an individual in discerning the call to vocational ministry?

In the Old Testament did others assist in the discernment of God's call on the lives of those he used for special tasks? Although there were times that God spoke directly and seemingly audibly to individuals, there were also times when other agents were involved. With the call of Samuel, Eli had to help the young boy recognize God's voice (1 Samuel 3), and with the call of Saul and David God used Samuel to communicate God's will (1 Samuel 10, 16). With the call of Elisha, Elijah played a role (1 Kings 19), and with the call of Joshua, Moses played a role. At a time near his death, Moses actually laid hands on Joshua indicating God's choosing of the next servant leader for the Israelites (Exodus 34:9).

²⁰ Doug Brown, "The Call to Ministry," n.p.
http://my.faith.edu/members/blog_view.asp?id=239094 (accessed October 8, 2008).

In the New Testament, the disciples were chosen publicly by Jesus coming to them and calling them. In the account of Paul's call to ministry, Ananias was used to help him recognize his call (Acts 9). In Timothy's life prophecies by elders influenced his call, and without question, his relationship with Paul played a major role in his recognition of his call to ministry.

There is also in the New Testament action taken by the church in the lives of others that show the church's involvement. In Acts 1, the community of faith was assigned the role of choosing who would take Judas' place as an apostle. The church chose two and sought God's direction through the casting of lots. In Acts 6, the community of faith is called upon to choose those they evaluated as being full of the Spirit and wisdom to serve as what is often thought to be the first Deacons. In Acts 13, after prayer and worship, the church set apart Paul and Barnabas to serve as missionaries.

When considering the rightful place for outside influence on the life of a person discerning a call to vocational ministry, one should note also the instruction in Scripture that believers are to *be* involved in the process. In somewhat of an indirect way of involvement in a person's service in ministry, believers are instructed to pray for God to send out workers. Matthew 9:38 states, "Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."

A more direct form of involvement and influence on the lives of those who may serve in ministry leadership is commanded to Pastor Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:2, where Paul says "the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others." This

command put Timothy in a position of observing those around him and deciding who would best be worth the effort of ministry investment. They would have to be qualified and they would have to be considered reliable in his personal opinion. This would certainly require intentionality on his part and awareness of what was going on in the lives of those whom he was pastoring.

Scripture demonstrates the idea that answering a call to vocational ministry is the recognition and acceptance of God's will to serve Him by serving others in a task focused on the spiritual needs, spiritual nurture, and spiritual development of others. Scripture also instructs and implies that there is a role to be played in discerning this call by those on the outside observing the lives of others. Communities of faith are instrumental in seeing in a person's life what that person is hearing in his or her heart. This project endeavors to develop a process for a local church and its leaders for being intentionally involved, formally and informally, in a person's discernment of a call to vocational ministry that honors the biblical pattern of call.

CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the broadest sense this project deals with the concept of call on a person's life. In the narrowest sense this project deals with how a local church and its leaders can help a person discern and confirm a call to vocational ministry. This literature review is guided by those two boundaries: the general call of any person and the recognition of a specific call to vocational ministry.

When a person begins to study the idea of being called to ministry, he soon discovers that the word "call" or "calling" has a wide range of meanings. Therefore, in order to get to the narrow scope of this project, some work had to be done in the area regarding "call" or "calling" on any person's life regardless of whether or not he is serving in a church vocation.

The most influential book on this author's life regarding the general idea of calling was *The Call: Finding and Fulfilling the Central Purpose of Your Life* by Os Guinness. This book is set up to be read slowly, one chapter a day or week, allowing reflection on the power of God's call in a person's life. As stated in Chapter 2, Guinness defines the call as "the truth that God calls us to himself so decisively that everything we are, everything we do, and everything we have is invested with a special devotion, dynamism, and direction lived out as a response to his summons and service."¹ The definition shows that Guinness sees calling as the guiding principle to everything that makes a life, and not just something that makes a living. He

¹Os Guinness, *The Call: Finding and Fulfilling the Central Purpose of Your Life* (Nashville, TN: Word, 1998), 29.

summarizes, “In short, calling in the Bible is a central and dynamic theme that becomes a metaphor for the life of faith itself.”²

Of all the books this author read on calling, this book was the first and the book that took the longest to read. It was *the* book that brought to the writer’s mind ideas and information about calling that had never been considered or organized.

Guinness brings together the ways that Scripture deals with call in various contexts (See Chapter 2). He also deals with the various ways that call has been applied in history. He identifies distortions of calling in history identifying them as the “Catholic distortion” and the “Protestant distortion.” The Catholic distortion, in his view, was a form of dualism that set calling up as something spiritual and thus separate from the secular. You were either called or you worked.

The Protestant distortion is another form of dualism, according to Guinness, but it set the secular over the spiritual. A person’s work became his purpose and call. Eventually, this digressed to a point of view that there is no divine “Caller”-- just “callings.” Vocation, instead of referring to a call by a Caller, became another term for a job or work. The answer to these two distortions, in Guinness’s opinion, is to actually bring them together. He writes,

In sum, we must avoid the two distortions by keeping the two callings together, stressing the primary calling to counter the Protestant distortion and secondary callings to counter the Catholic distortion. Whereas dualism cripples calling, a holistic understanding releases its power—the passion to be God’s concentrates the energy of all who answers the call.³

Guinness’s book introduces ideas that challenged, right from the start, much of this writer’s “call jargon” that had become a part of my language due to a Southern

² Guinness, *The Call*, 30-31.

³ Guinness, *The Call*, 42.

Baptist background. Phrases like “answering the call” and “running from the call” along with statements like “full-time Christian service” and “called to ministry” were described by him as distortions and a way of creating a class of spiritual elitists or spiritual aristocrats.⁴

The idea that calling has been associated with some kind of spiritual upper class through the ages is addressed also by Barkalow in his book, *It's Your Call*. In his search for significance and purpose for life, he finds answers in the concept of call that were once missed due to the way church history presented the idea of call. He states,

In the past, the church held an elitist view of people and their callings, where only a few were chosen to do something sacred. These select few could be easily recognized by their religious title, position, or clothing. If you did not have the desire or opportunity to do something within the church, your life's work was not of eternal consequence. Your expected position in life was simply to subject yourself to the church's teaching and direction, with your highest goal being to live a moral life and to support the church's vision and institutions.⁵

Barkalow defines calling as “a weighty purpose in life” and says “it is not just for a few.”⁶

Writing more than forty years prior, Ben Lacy Rose saw the importance of calling and vocation being applied in broader ways than just a few choice servants. He writes from a standpoint of realizing something new in church culture when he says in 1967, “Heretofore we have thought that only the preacher and the missionary were called of God to their regular work. But we are coming to see that

⁴ Guinness, *The Call*, 33.

⁵ Gary Barkalow, *It's Your Call: What Are You Doing Here?* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2010), 22.

⁶ Barkalow, *It's Your Call*, 3.

every believer in Christ is called of God, and that every Christian should view his occupation as a calling from the Lord.”⁷

The difficulty in dealing with calling is also associated, in some ways, with the changing use of the word “vocation” down through the ages. Gene Edward Veith, Jr., tries to reclaim the word “vocation” in his discussion on calling and work. His book, *God at Work: Your Christian Vocation in All of Life*, takes “vocation” and uses it as a synonym for “calling” based on the original Latin meaning and more heavily, on Gustaf Wingren’s work, *Luther on Vocation*.

Veith writes a doctrine of vocation. He interchanges the words vocation and calling repeatedly, and he argues for seeing all areas of life—work, family, citizenship, and church--as a way to fulfill a person’s calling. He says, “vocation is a theology of the Christian life...Christians don’t have to be called to the mission field or the ministry or the work of evangelism to serve God...Rather , the Christian life is to be lived in vocation....”⁸

Though the crux of this project is not to explain all there is to know about “vocation,” one significant book related to the topic should be mentioned here due to its value to the subject. *Callings: Twenty Centuries of Christian Wisdom on Vocation*, edited by William C. Placher, divides Christian writings up into four time periods. Samples of what were written during that particular time period on the subject of “vocation” are presented with introductory comments by Placher. His

⁷ Ben Lacy Rose, *Confirming Your Call* (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1967), 70.

⁸ Veith, *God At Work*, 157.

work demonstrates the changing use of a word related to God's call over a two-thousand-year time period.⁹

The next category of literature researched for this project focused on a more narrow category of calling than just any vocation--a calling to *ministry*. Are people not only called, but are some called to ministry specifically? According to some writers, to be called is to *be* a minister. This is the argument of Henlee Barnette in his book, *Has God Called You?*, where he states, "Every person who responds to God's call is a minister, a member of the priesthood of all believers, with priestly functions."¹⁰ Again he states, "Since every person called is a Christian minister and a member of the royal priesthood, there is no basic distinction between 'clergy' and 'laity' in the New Testament."¹¹ He later adds,

All Christians are called to be ministers regardless of their occupations in life...Regardless of how a Christian makes his livelihood, he is to serve as a minister in some capacity in the church. This is not merely "part-time" service, as over against "full-time" service, but a call to "full-life" service.¹²

Other writers make a point to identify all believers as not only called but called to ministry, due to the fact that to minister means to serve. Jeff Iorg says in his book, *Is God Calling Me?*, "God calls every believer to Christian service."¹³ Alice Cullinan, author of *Sorting It Out*, states the "biblical reference to ministry involves

⁹ William C. Placher, ed., *Callings: Twenty Centuries of Christian Wisdom on Vocation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Erdmans Publishing, 2005).

¹⁰ Henlee Barnette, *Has God Called You?* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1969), 17.

¹¹ Barnette, *Has God Called You?*, 18.

¹² Barnette, *Has God Called You*, 68.

¹³ Jeff Iorg, *Is God Calling Me? Answering the Question Every Believer Asks* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2008), 18.

the responsibility and work of all believers.”¹⁴ Again she says, “all Christians are called to minister in their roles as disciples of Christ.”¹⁵

The discussion surrounding all believers being called and all believers being called to ministry is certainly supported in Scripture. However, there is still the narrower sense that some in Scripture and in history seem not to be just called to general service of the Lord in life, but to a more specific kind of ministry that aids in the work of the church or the building up of the Kingdom of God, due to their place of leadership. These are positions that we see in everyday life in the form of church staff positions and seminary positions as well as missionaries in different cultures.

There is an attempt by many authors to distinguish this role of more formal service or specific service, even among those who stress the universal calling and responsibility of Christians. Consider Barnette when he moves from talking about “general” callings to “particular” callings as referenced by Cullinan, who herself uses the term “special call.”¹⁶ Iorg raises this idea of a more specific calling within ministry when he moves from talking about universal callings to a “general calling to ministry leadership”¹⁷ Then there is H. Richard Niebuhr, who refers to this kind specific call as “the secret call,” which in his understanding is a description of being “summoned or invited by God to take up the work of the ministry.”¹⁸

The great concern in all of these descriptions is attempting to walk the narrow rail of talking about a call to a specific task in ministry without raising that

¹⁴ Alice R. Cullinan, *Sorting It Out: Discerning God’s Call to Ministry* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1999), 3.

¹⁵ Cullinan, *Sorting It Out*, 6.

¹⁶ Cullinan, *Sorting It Out*, 4-5.

¹⁷ Iorg, *Is God Calling Me?*, 22.

¹⁸ Cullinan, *Sorting It Out*, 5.

call to a greater level of value than calls to general Christian service or even a Christians daily vocation. This is evidenced by Barnett, who acknowledges particular callings, cautioning, “this does not make them superior to the church or to their fellow Christians.”¹⁹

In light of literature on calling, ministry, and vocation, this author has come to use the phrase ‘called to vocational ministry’ to distill the discussion and focus the conversation. “Called to vocational ministry” blends the biblical teaching on calling and ministry with modern-day understanding of vocation and communicates a concept of one called by God, as noted in Chapter 2, to serve Him by serving others in a task focused on the spiritual needs, spiritual nurture, and spiritual development of another person or group of persons.

One might ask at this point in researching calling, vocation, and ministry if having a sense of call to vocational ministry is really that important. What difference does knowing you are called and being confident of that call make in ministry?

The importance of a sense of call is addressed by many who discuss the subject. According to Andrew Purves, problems in ministry occur when we see ministry as *ours* or, in essence, something we have chosen, or something we can do. He writes in *The Crucifixion of Ministry*, “Conceiving ministry as *our* ministry is the root of what ails us in ministry today.”²⁰ The ministry that we are called to is God

¹⁹ Cullinan, *Sorting It Out*, 4.

²⁰ Andrew Purves, *The Crucifixion of Ministry: Surrendering Our Ambitions to the Service of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2007), 11.

working through us to continue the work of Jesus through us to others. We are part of a continuum.

Knowing that we are called to vocational ministry becomes the anchor to longevity in ministry. This is a crucial lesson to learn when dealing with the subject of discerning and confirming a call. Those early days of discernment will be visited again and again by ministers as they serve in future, and often difficult, roles. The authors of *Preventing Ministry Failure* explain,

Without a personal invitation from God to serve as a minister, we lack the distinguishing factor for sustained ministry effectiveness: perseverance. When all else is in doubt, confidence in such an invitation is critical. We must know without question we've been called to do exactly what we're doing. Sometimes this "knowing" will be the only tangible anchor during the stormy seasons of ministry—and of those, there will be plenty.²¹

A person being certain of his call to vocational ministry also provides confidence, serves as a source of authority, and sets priorities. Speaking specifically regarding a call to preach, Greg Heisler writes in *Spirit-led Preaching*,

The surest way to a powerless preaching ministry is to doubt God's calling...We must believe that when we stand and deliver God's Word to God's people, we are doing so because we have been summoned there by God himself...The preacher's authority as a herald sent by God comes directly from the call of God on his life and the message God gives him to preach...we also receive the divine mandate for our ministry when we surrender to God's calling. We do not choose the focus of our ministry; it is chosen for us by the nature and responsibility of the calling.²²

Another crucial factor in possessing a confident discernment of call is related to character. Some writers believe that the motivation for walking in righteousness is tied to a sense of call. William Willimon points out that laziness in a pastor's life is

²¹ Brad Hoffman and Michael Todd Wilson, *Preventing Ministry Failure* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2007), 66.

²² Greg Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2007), 72-73.

due to one who has “lost a compelling sense of vocation,” and goes on to say that, “vocation is the wellspring of pastoral morality.”²³

As this project focuses in on helping individuals recognize and confirm their call to vocational ministry, the weight of the responsibility increases when the importance of “knowing” is seen. Discernment that leads to a confident sense of call becomes a source of strength for years down the road.

Narrowing the focus even more, how does a person discern a call to vocational ministry? How does a person get to a place of knowing? How does God call? With the focus of this project being the role of a local church in helping a person recognize his call, having an awareness of the signs of a call coming to a person’s life is critical.

Several books and articles exist addressing how a person knows when God is calling him to vocational ministry. The following are those that seem the most helpful and would be useful to have available for those attempting to discern the call. These instead are books that would likely be on a reading list for enquiring minds and prospective ministers.

According to Iorg, in his book *Is God Calling Me?*, he believes, based on Scripture, that “God calls through sudden experiences, reasoned decisions, and the prompting of others.”²⁴ He goes on to say that a person discerns his call to

²³ William H. Willimon, *Calling and Character: Virtues of the Ordained Life* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2000), 120-21.

²⁴ Iorg, *Is God Calling Me?*, 32.

vocational ministry through an inner peace, confirmation by others, effectiveness in ministry, and joy in ministry.²⁵

Cullinan, in her book *Sorting It Out*, points out there are three common elements in most people's call to vocational ministry. These common elements are a restlessness in one's current activity, an inner tug from God, and confirmation from others in their community of faith.²⁶

Cullinan also describes discernment guidelines that serve as buoys to the process. The six she suggests are Scripture, prayer, circumstances, a person's interests and desires, spiritual gifts, and inner promptings.²⁷

Ben Campbell Johnson, in his book *Hearing God's Call: Ways of Discernment for Laity and Clergy*, offers a nine-step guide for reflection in considering God's call.

1. God often speaks through an idea that emerges in our consciousness.
2. God often speaks to you through another person's affirmation of a gift you've been given.
3. God often speaks directly through a text in Scripture....
4. God often calls when we come face to face with human pain.
5. God speaks to us...through our own pain.
6. Stirrings of the soul are often God's whispered beckonings.
7. The prelude to a call from God often takes the form of restlessness.
8. At times God calls in such a gentle way that the engagement feels quite natural and undramatic.
9. Sometimes a call originates in an experience as simple as an invitation by another to share in an existing ministry.²⁸

He suggests that a person allow these nine thoughts to serve as markers along a journey toward discerning God's call.

²⁵ Iorg, *Is God Calling Me?*, 58-66.

²⁶ Cullinan, *Sorting It Out*, 22-23.

²⁷ Cullinan, *Sorting It Out*, 29-37.

²⁸ Ben Campbell Johnson, *Hearing God's Call: Ways of Discernment for Laity and Clergy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Erdman's Publishing, 2002), 36-44.

Calling attention to the vivid experience of Moses having a burning bush to settle his call, James Mason acknowledges that most calls to ministry are much more subtle. He offers five suggestions for discerning a call.

The call to become a minister must be born out of a compassion to be a Christian.

The call to become a minister is affirmed by the circumstances of life.

The call to become a minister is evidenced by the gifts for ministry.

The call to become a minister is a call to servanthood and is validated by a servant's heart.

The call to become a minister is clarified and confirmed by the counsel of others.²⁹

Writing more than a hundred years earlier, C. H. Spurgeon offered four ways that a person will be able to discern and confirm their call to vocational ministry in the area of preaching specifically. In his *Lectures to My Students*, he asked the question, "How may a young man know whether he is called or not?"³⁰ He answers,

1. The first sign of the heavenly calling is an intense, all absorbing desire for the work....
2. In the second place...there must be aptness to teach and some measure of the other qualities needed for the office of a public instructor.
3. In order further to prove a man's call, after a little exercise of his gifts...he must see a measure of conversion-work going on under his efforts....
4. The will of the Lord concerning pastors is made known through the prayerful judgment of His church.³¹

Thomas Oden, in his work, *Pastoral Theology: Essentials of Ministry*, couches the discernment process within two parameters—the inward call and the outward call. The *inward* call involves self examination of desires and competency. The

²⁹ James Mason, "The Call to Ministry," *Heart and Mind*, Fall 1989, 5-6.

³⁰ Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1954), 25.

³¹ Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*, 26-32.

outward call “requires the affirmation of the visible, believing community.”³² He goes as far as to say that the call to ministry is thought to be “testable, and dangerous if unexamined.”³³

This idea of an *inward* and *outward* discernment process is supported by Al Mohler, President of Southern Seminary. He writes, “First, there is an inward call. Through His Spirit, God speaks.... Those whom God has called know this by a sense of leading, purpose, and growing commitment.... Second, there is the external call.... God uses the congregation to ‘call out the called.’”³⁴ Compare those comments to those of President of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, Dennis Hollinger. When asked to comment on the local church’s role of raising up the next generation of pastors he said,

One of the best ways to develop leadership for the church of tomorrow is for churches to help young people to discern the call. The call of God to ministry is always both individual and communal—the call of a person to the ministry of the gospel, but a call which is recognized, affirmed, and enabled by the local church.³⁵

As one might expect there are several common threads that weave through the different suggestions dealing with discerning the call. The one, however, that

³² Thomas C. Oden, *Pastoral Theology: Essentials of Ministry* (Cambridge, MA: Harper & Row Publishers, 1983), 20.

³³ Oden, *Pastoral Theology*, 18.

³⁴ Albert Mohler, comment on “Has God Called You? Discerning the Call to Preach,” Albert Mohler Blog, comment posted February 11, 2008, http://www.albertmohler.com/blog_print.php?id=1095 (accessed February 13, 2008).

³⁵ Jonathan Leeman, ed., “A Seminary President’s Forum,” *9Marks eJournal* (January/February 2009), http://sites.silaspartners.com/cc/article/0,,PTID314526_CIID2463324,00.html (accessed July 13, 2011).

connects to this project is the reoccurring theme of *outward* influence and the role of the family of faith in recognizing and affirming a person's call.

Consider other writers on this subject. In Doug Brown's article, "The Call to Ministry," he mentions the aspect of outward influence when he writes, "While the church does not generate the call to ministry, the church should recognize it.... It is interesting to note that the call to ministry will often be evident to others even before the one called recognizes it himself."³⁶

The place of outward influence on a person's call is consistent within stories of personal testimonies of those serving in vocational ministry. *The Call*, written by David Nasser and Brent Crowe, is a book recording interviews with twenty-nine influential servants in Kingdom work. It is billed as a book that gives "insights from those who have answered (the call) and practical advice for those who are about to."³⁷ Several of those interviewed are asked how they knew God had called them to ministry. Twelve out of the sixteen that were asked, specifically, about their call to ministry, mention some kind of outward influence in the discernment process.³⁸

With the evidence and understanding that a person's call to vocational ministry does involve outward involvement in discernment, the focus of literature research becomes even more narrow zeroing in on information focused on local church leadership and their role in helping others answer God's call on their life. This arena of research has been fascinating, leading this writer to the discovery of

³⁶ Doug Brown, "The Call to Ministry," n.p.
http://my.faith.edu/members/blog_view.asp?id=239094 (accessed October 6, 2008).

³⁷ Brent Crowe and David Nasser, Back cover to *The Call* (RedemptiveArtPublishing.com, 2009).

³⁸ Crowe, *The Call*, Summary of contents.

intentional processes being carried out on college campuses, through web-site interaction developed by Christian colleges, in retreat settings produced by denominations, by think-tanks like The Fund for Theological Education, and local churches.

One of the most exciting and convicting works related to the role of outward influence on a person's call was written in 1908 by John R. Mott, entitled *The Future Leadership of the Church*. This book is a passionate cry for church leaders to be intentionally involved in not only the recognition and affirmation of people experiencing a call to vocational ministry, but also to take it a step further, purposefully recruiting people to ministry. His book goes from discussing the urgent need for more church ministers to the point of covering influences that will assist in the calling-out of those being called by God. He writes with a burden, believing that other jobs have taken on a more glamorous and respected place in society, leading to many people who are called not considering a life of vocational ministry that who might have otherwise.

Mott lays the role and responsibility of outward influence primarily at the feet of pastors. He writes, "The minister... can do more than anyone else to recruit men for ministry."³⁹ He finishes the book by offering a description of the environment that will lead to the recruitment, recognition, and affirmation of a call to ministry in greater numbers. He suggests sermons that present the call to both candidates and their parents. He recommends the minister spend time getting to know young people marking in his spirit and mind those that seem to have God's

³⁹ John R. Mott, *The Future Leadership of the Church* (New York, NY: Young Men's Christian Association, 1908), 141.

hand on their life. He speaks of praying for God to help the minister to recognize those He is calling, providing literature that tells the stories of the call of others, such as biographies, and the importance of presenting the vocation of ministry in a positive light.⁴⁰

Almost one hundred years later, a similar plea was discovered by this writer in the works of a ministry called 9Marks. Established by Pastor Mark Dever, this ministry is based out of Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington, DC. In a 2009 eJournal, the ministry devoted the entire issue to the church's role in raising up future ministers, particularly pastors. Jonathan Leeman writes in his editorial note, "God primarily calls and equips men for the pastorate as pastors faithfully shepherd and disciple their own congregations."⁴¹ Eight different articles in this online journal cover topics ranging from the recognition of future ministers to preparing them for ministry in local church seminary environments.

One other aspect that unfolds when looking for a local church's role in the discernment process is that not only is there an outward part of the call, but this outward facet of the call takes on both a formal and informal approach. Some churches and ministry environments are intentional about recognizing future ministers, but there is no structure to the process. Other environments have formal processes that include things such as internships, scheduled weekly meetings, and assigned responsibilities and reading.

⁴⁰ Mott, *The Future Leadership of the Church*, 141-193.

⁴¹ Jonathan Leeman ed., Editorial note in "Raising Up the Next Generation of Pastors," *9Marks eJournal* (January/February 2009), <http://www.9marks.org/ejournal/raising-next-generation-pastors> (accessed July 13, 2011).

In her article, “Raising Up Young People for Ministry,” Julie Peters describes, informal but intentional, outward involvement in a person’s call journey. She believes churches must build a “culture of call” by making it a core value in ministries and by regularly presenting ministry “as an exciting and fulfilling option for the young people in our congregations.”⁴²

Another example of the informal/intentional environment that has been identified as helping people know God’s call on their life for ministry is an activity identified as *mozying*. In many ways this is similar to mentoring, however, the term has a cultural connection to the Korean church. Sinai Chung describes this approach,

...the term *mozy* originates from the Korean word meaning “the oldest sibling in a family.” In its linguistic sense, *mozying* simply means what the oldest sibling practices. I call this practice *mozying* because it resembles what the oldest siblings in Korean families do for the younger siblings. I use the term *mozier* for the older group of people who are mentoring, and *moziees* for the younger group of people who are mentored.⁴³

According to Chung, there are three informal responsibilities for the mozier as he relates to the moziees. The mozier takes care of the moziees, invests in the moziees, and acts as role models for the moziees. The relationship is much more intense than general mentoring due to the personal care that develops within the connection.⁴⁴

Within this context of relationship in church settings many have found their call and moved toward a life of vocational ministry. Sung stated, “All...who have

⁴² Julie Peters, “Raising Up Young People for Ministry,” *Circuit Rider* 35 (November/December/ January 2010-11): 28.

⁴³ Dori Grinenko Baker, *Greenhouses of Hope: Congregations Growing Young Leaders Who Will Change the World*, ed. Sinai Chung (Herndon, VA: Alban, 2010), 69.

⁴⁴ Grinenko, *Greenhouses of Hope*, 70-71.

been nurtured as young pastor leaders...agreed that this mozying was the most influential aspect of their vocational exploration.⁴⁵

At this point in the literature review I want to describe some intentional and formal environments that have been discovered in my research. These programs are instituted by four different groups—foundations and trusts, denominational ministry, colleges and seminaries, and local churches. These four groups each have aspects that will undoubtedly form the underpinnings of a local church plan in my own community of faith.

The first arena where there is work going on to help people recognize their call to vocational ministry is being done through ministries that are funded by trusts and foundations who have a passion for ministry in the world. One example of this work is The Fund for Theological Education. This organization has developed an initiative referred to as Calling Congregations, produced a future church leaders environment for discernment called vocationCARE, and recently published *Greenhouses of Hope: Congregations Growing Young Leaders who Will Change the World*, edited by Dori Baker. This 2010 volume, cited earlier in reference to mozying, reports on five different congregations that have environments which promote the discovery of a call to vocational ministry.

The second arena where discernment opportunities are being offered is on the denominational level. One example is the KALEO Network, produced by the North American Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. KALEO provides conferences and resources designed to help high school, college, and

⁴⁵ Grinenko, *Greenhouses of Hope*, 77.

seminary students discover, embrace, and pursue God's call on their life for ministry.

This environment is a very positive piece to helping a person discern a call but is very much a one-shot kind of approach. The opportunities offered could provide a helpful tool for discernment but should not be relied upon as the whole tool box.

The third environment that has programs for helping in the discernment process is colleges and seminaries. Two of these with very similar structures and objectives are Compass, operated by Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, and Hearing the Call, operated by Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary. Both of these programs are funded by grants from the Lilly Endowment.

The two programs take church-nominated high school students, connect them with mentors and involve them in ministry experiences. The goal of these environments is to identify, equip, and mentor them for future church ministry.

Both of these environments are encouraging discoveries for the discernment process. They are, again, tools that pastors who would intentionally be looking for future ministers would want to include in their offerings to help a person discern the call to ministry. Two drawbacks to the environments, though, would be the necessity for building a brand new relationship between the parties and then the long-term commitment required to participate in the process. If this discernment process was carried out directly in the local church setting there would be both familiarity with the candidate and flexibility with the length of commitment.

Another resource available to individuals interested in discerning their call to vocational ministry is an on-line resource produced by Zion Bible College. The website, explorethecall.com, is both broad and detailed. The site offers on-line mentoring, chat rooms for people to talk with others exploring the call, weekly podcasts, weblinks to other sites about the call, and blogs offering advice about discerning the call. The site is engaging and inviting but lacks the personal touch on face-to-face interaction.

The fourth arena, and the focus of this project, relates to the local church and her role and involvement in the discernment process. What are local churches doing, exclusively, to help? The answer to that question will partially come out in the next chapter in the interview process with other pastors. Some ongoing work has also been found in articles in pastor-focused magazines such as *Circuit Rider* of the United Methodist Church.

At this point, for clarification, this project stops short of dealing with the topic of preparation for ministry. A number of churches around the globe today are operating their own seminaries for the preparation of ministers. Examples of these would be the Master's Seminary out of Grace Community Church, pastored by John McArthur, and Bethlehem College and Seminary out of Bethlehem Baptist, pastored by John Piper. The discernment process usually starts long before entrance into seminary, and that is a role any church can fulfill.

A very detailed and intentional approach to churches helping young people discern their call to ministry is going on in the life of the United Methodist Church of the Resurrection in Leawood, Kansas. Under the direction of Julie Peters, this

church has developed a ministry called Ministry as a Career Track (MAC Track). According to Peters, they will begin their third year of ministry in the Fall of 2011, and they are “currently working with over sixty middle school and high school students who are exploring a call to vocational ministry.”⁴⁶

The explanation and contact for this ministry is all contained on a website students can access when they are thinking about their future. The existence of the site itself is an element of creating a culture of call within the local church. Think about what it must say to parents and teens, knowing that each time they go to their church website there is the opportunity to explore ministry as a vocation.

The website, mactrack.blogs.cor.org, includes opportunities for students to write devotionals, receive encouragement, find resources, as well as options for connecting with ministry opportunities. The stated purpose MAC Track is targeting is a commitment “to excellence in offering students a realistic view of ministry, developing leadership through experiential learning, and providing an authentic Christian community where students with similar goals are whole-heartedly seeking to discern God’s direction for their lives.”⁴⁷

The opportunities provided to a person exploring ministry as a vocation through MAC Track are expansive. Persons who connect with this ministry are provided with mentoring relationships—one-on-one or in group settings. They are given opportunities to job shadow, lead ministries, discover their spiritual giftedness, and participate in mission trips.

⁴⁶ Peters, “Raising Up Young People for Ministry,” 29.

⁴⁷ Bueno, “What is MACTrack,” <http://mactrack.blogs.cor.org/about/> (accessed July 27, 2011).

The one element that is glaringly missing from the ministry is any kind of recruiting of the potentially called. The initial contact with the exploration process seemingly is initiated only by the one considering the call to ministry.

Without question, the frame work of this ministry will weigh heavily on what is developed as the final project of this writer. Each context of ministry is different, demanding unique ministry processes, but the concept of MACTrack is the resource most like the desired end result of this project.

Again, let it be noted that the context of this research project is in a church community, Watkinsville First Baptist, which sees six thousand new students enroll as freshman each year at the University of Georgia. This figure is given without even considering the number of middle and high school students in the area. MAC Track does have some principles that will carry over into the life of college students, but the design of this ministry is focused on students in grade twelve and down. This context calls to mind the words of Mott, written in 1908 about the future of the church, when he said, "Ministers located in college towns should improve the unique opportunity of cultivating the friendship of strong Christian students..."⁴⁸ in order to present to them the consideration of ministry as a vocation.

One final area of research needs to be noted in light of the scope of this project. This relates to ways that churches can go beyond helping a person discern his call to also helping them confirm that call.

The traditional way confirmation has been formally handled in previous generations has been through the procedure of ordination. In Southern Baptist life,

⁴⁸ Mott, *The Future Leadership of the Church*, 147.

from which this writer comes, licensure has also been a part of this confirmation and affirmation process.

Writing in 1981, Felix Montgomery noted that licensing was a formal way of a church affirming the initial awareness of a person's public declaration of a call to ministry. He said, "When you have made a public statement of your call, your local church will take note of your decision.... Licensing is the process whereby Baptist churches have traditionally set their approval on a ministerial candidate.... Licensing simply provides a time of personal testing, preparation, and practice...."⁴⁹

Ordination goes a step further than licensing. This happens in a person's life after a time of preparation and testing and is evidence that a local body of believers sees evidence of the call of God on a person's life. This outward confirmation of a person's call is described by Montgomery,

An individual's call to leadership must also be confirmed by the local congregation. When the church sees evidence to a divine call they will affirm that call by setting apart the person for special service. The act of confirming or ordaining is a practical way of publicly launching persons into their God-called ministry.⁵⁰

The literature review has moved from a broad survey of the concept of call to a narrow focus on the outward role of a church in a person's recognition and confirmation of their call. Ways that Watkinsville First Baptist can uniquely be a part of this process in a person's life will be influenced by what has been discovered. The discussion will be further defined in the next chapter based on interviews with those who have recognized the call of God on their life and with those who have had

⁴⁹ Felix Montgomery, *Pursuing God's Call: Choosing a Vocation in Ministry* (Nashville, TN: Convention Press, 1981), 78-81.

⁵⁰ Montgomery, *Pursuing God's Call*, 90.

the experience of seeing many called and confirmed to ministry under their pastoral leadership.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT DESIGN

As concluded in Chapter two the Bible indicates there is a role for other believers to fill, in helping a person discern his call to vocational ministry. Also, as seen in a review of literature on the subject of a call to vocational ministry, the involvement of people that are spiritual influencers in the lives of those seeking to discern a call to vocational ministry is both appropriate and needed. This involvement serves to assist a person in confidently recognizing and confirming a ministry calling. In light of these observations, a question appears: what have those that are serving in vocational ministry actually experienced in the process of answering that call? Is it true that outward involvement from others helped settle an inward sense that God was calling? Furthermore, in environments where many have responded to the call to vocational ministry, did the actions of those in positions of influence have a bearing on many of those called responding?

In order to discover the level of outward influence and impact on people discerning the call to vocational ministry, two groups of ministers have been interviewed. First, twenty ministers serving in a vocational role of ministry were asked face-to-face, four specific questions directed at the level of impact of outward influencers on their recognition and confirmation of their call. Those questions were:

1. How did you know God had called you to vocational ministry?
2. What role did your community of faith play in you recognizing your call?

3. What role has your community of faith played in your continuation in ministry?
4. What things could a church family do to help others recognize and confirm the call to ministry?

Second, five ministers who have had those under their care respond openly to God's call to vocational ministry were interviewed face-to-face and were asked five specific questions. These questions were directed at discovering the formal or informal environments that were in place that would lead to people answering the call. Also, these questions were designed to discover what intentional actions were taken by these influencers that might have led to others discerning and confirming their own call. Those questions were:

1. What role did the local church play in your call to ministry?
2. How many people are currently serving in ministry that came through your ministry?
3. In what ways are people presented with the possibility of answering the call to vocational ministry?
4. What informal things about the environment of your community of faith promote the recognition of a call to ministry?
5. What formal ways does the church where you serve promote, recognize, and encourage those answering the call?

Some further details regarding the twenty-five interviews may assist the reader in understanding this author's process of research and collecting

information. These details may also help if a person is attempting to compare the findings to their environment of ministry service.

The interviewees were white, both male and female, and from different denominations. Geographically, they all experienced their call to ministry while living in the southern United States. The interviews with each interviewee took place over a ten month time span from March of 2011 until January of 2012. The interviews were scheduled in advance and took place face-to-face, one-on-one, in a conversational style environment. The interviews were conducted over meals, at coffee shops, while attending joint conferences and also in casual vacation settings. The intent of the meeting was stated up front with the explanation given that a list of particular questions would be asked related to a person's call to vocational ministry. Each interview involved approximately an hour of conversation.

Those interviewed for the project were not first-time acquaintances. There was some history shared between this author and the interviewees prior to the interview. This history was helpful in that the answers given to the questions resonated more clearly in that the context of ministry the interviewee described had been witnessed personally by the researcher over the span of several years of observation and relationship.

In the following pages the responses from each interview will be paraphrased from hand written notes taken during the personal interviews. Each interviewee is important in that they give some unique perspective on the topic of outward influence in discerning a call to ministry.

The first group of twenty interviews will be labeled “Interviews with Those Serving” and referenced as A1, A2, A3, etc. The second group of five interviews will be labeled “Interviews with Influencers” and referenced as B1, B2, B3, etc.

The first group of twenty interviews will be reported in sub-categories according to the person’s role in vocational ministry. In this pool of twenty interviews there are six lead pastors, nine associate pastors and church ministry directors, one denominational leader, one seminary director, one director of a missionary-sending agency and two para-church ministers.

Interviews with Those Serving

How did you know God had called you to vocational ministry?

Lead Pastors

A1

There was not a clear and definite moment of God saying this is what you have to do. But there was a longing and a desire in me for ministry at which I came to a point of peace. There was affirmation in my path along with opportunities to serve. There was a sense that developed in me that if I blow this there is nothing else for me to do in life. I began to look at the gifts God had given me to see where they fit in for serving.¹

A2

I was saved at 24 while working as an engineer. Six months later there was a restlessness that had developed in my spirit. There was a regular thought that something more was out there for me to do. I sat down with my dad who was a pastor and he told me that I needed “a word from the Word.” I maintained a regular discipline of reading the Word and listening to God speak. God used John 1 and John 15, along with some reading I was doing in a book called *The Quest for Character*, to settle in my heart God was calling me.²

¹A1, interviewed by author, Athens, GA, July 20, 2011.

² A2, interviewed by author, Atlanta, GA, July 21, 2011.

A3

During my senior year of high school I had a strong year of spiritual renewal. Through leading Bible studies with others I realized this is who I am and what I wanted to do with my life.³

A4

At the age of 13, while involved with a youth choir, I remember thinking I want my life to matter and count and to be used serving the Lord. I was surrounded by an environment of spiritual life during those early teen years. When I was 15, I was at a youth retreat and heard the pastor talk about his call to preach. The pastor encouraged us to “go off by yourself and listen to the Lord for what God wants you to do.” While reading and praying I sensed God was saying, “Preach.” There was a sense of “ought-ness” that came on me. I talked to my pastor that night about this call and asked what should I do. He simply said, “walk with God and preach if God says preach.”⁴

A5

At the age of 38, my pastor asked me if I had ever considered the ministry. I ignored the question in many ways, but it was always kind of in the back of my mind. At the age of 40 God worked in my life to show me He could use me and that I was just bad when I did not have him in my life. I went forward in a church service and announced God was calling me. I spent the next 45-90 days reading and seeking God’s will for my life. Confirmation began to come from others, from Scripture, and from opportunities to serve.⁵

A6

God’s call on my life was gradual, beginning when I was a child around the age of 10. My mom became troubled over me and went to talk to her pastor about the fact that her 10-year-old wanted to be a pastor. He told her to have me read Ecclesiastes and I would get over it. Later, in high school, I had to do a persuasive speech, and I did that based on the benefits of being a clergyman, thinking at the time of ministry as a formal profession. While in college I was involved with Fellowship of Christian Athletes and this ministry combined with a course in Marriage and Family Development, led me to a point where I thought ministry was what I wanted to do. I met with my advisor, and he told me to do what I wanted to do in ministry, not in the academic field.⁶

³ A3, interviewed by author, Watkinsville, GA, November 17, 2011.

⁴ A4, interviewed by author, Gatlinburg, TN, November 21, 2011.

⁵ A5, interviewed by author, Gatlinburg, TN, November 21, 2011.

⁶ A6, interviewed by author, Athens, GA, October 28, 2011.

Associate Pastors and Church Ministry Directors

A7

I had lots of opportunities as a teen to lead in ministry environments. There came a time in my life where each time I opened the Bible I wanted to tell others about what I was learning. Others knowing about salvation and the Gospel became a burden.⁷

A8

At the age of 12, while at a youth camp, I noticed a lot of older students were answering a call to ministry. This sort of created a culture of calling in the youth group. At the age of 13 the possibility of God calling me was constantly on my mind, but I did not want the pressure of this at this age. I loved being around my youth pastor, and he would spend a lot of time with me reading the Word and praying. When I was a senior, this guy asked me why I had never surrendered to ministry. I put him off and did my own thing. At the age of 20, a church needed some help in a leadership role, and I volunteered. This brought back all the thoughts of the past. I talked with other pastors about how they knew they were called. Eventually, I went forward in a church service and said publicly that God was calling me. Opportunities started coming for ministry confirming my call.⁸

A9

I was a college student, and I was nearing the end of my degree. I noticed guys were not getting jobs, and this made me think about what I should do with my life. I was involved in a discipleship group, and I was also getting opportunities to lead discipleship weekends with teenagers. I began to notice that God was using me to build the lives of others. Seeing God using me was the biggest factor.⁹

A10

My call was a process over time, or at least recognizing it was. I still remember as a kid a friend saying to me, "One day you are going to be a preacher." I was not saved until I was in college, but I had grown up in a very

⁷ A7, interviewed by author, Auburn, AL, March 2, 2011.

⁸ A8, interviewed by author, Gatlinburg, TN, November 21, 2011.

⁹ A9, interviewed by author, Gatlinburg, TN, November 21, 2011.

active youth group. While in college I started going to a class my pastor did each week for those interested in ministry. I wanted that influence and took the initiative to be there. I loved discipling and speaking. I began to have opportunities to serve and speak. I took the role of a summer youth worker, and this time of service was used by God to confirm my call. This happened through conversations with others over the course of that summer.¹⁰

A11

I was converted in college. After this conversion I began to spend time with a campus minister one-and-one-half hours every week. We studied the Bible, and I was just “with him” week after week. I was in an environment where ministry was healthy and real. I was teaching school and coaching but took a summer trip for two-and-one-half months doing camp and resort ministries. When I returned, I hated teaching and coaching. During a sermon I heard a story about guys laying down their life for others to cross over an electrical line. I saw this as God’s way of calling me to lay down my life for others to get them to the other side. I shared with my pastor this at the end of the service. He invited me to attend his once-a-week pastor’s class. Two weeks in he asked me to go and speak at a prison. I preached and had never felt more alive. I knew this was it.¹¹

A12

My call to music ministry was very Jonah-like in that I attempted to fight against it. I wanted to be a traveling singer but did not have a heart for ministry. I just kept being nudged by the Lord. I was saved so I sang for the Lord. More and more opportunities kept coming to sing for the Lord. I kept saying “yes” then to those opportunities.¹²

A13

I had been a Christian for a year when I realized God was calling me. During that year I was discipled by my youth pastor. Over that year I was reading a book by John Stott that was speaking to my heart. While in a group study, I was challenged to do something else other than ministry and if I could, then do it. I realized there was nothing else for my life than ministry.¹³

¹⁰ A10, interviewed by author, Auburn, AL, November 25, 2011.

¹¹ A11, interviewed by author, Athens, GA, December 1, 2011.

¹² A12, interviewed by author, Winder, GA, November 15, 2011.

¹³ A13, interviewed by author, Athens, GA, November 10, 2011.

A14

My high school youth pastor kept telling me he saw traits in my life and spiritual gifts that God was going to use in ministry. This was echoing what my school teacher and FCA director was saying to me. They would say “God has something special for you.” A lady once came up to me and put her hand on me and said “I am a Christian, and I want you to know that God is going to use you greatly one day.” I would love listening to my pastor, and I would walk away saying that is what I am going to do one day. On a Sunday evening while I was reading Isaiah 6, I knew God was calling me.¹⁴

A15

There were several steps in a process of me coming to a point of realizing God was calling me to ministry. During my sophomore year of college I led a study with a girl, and I sensed a peace about helping someone with spiritual things like I had never before this time. My senior year, due to conversations with friends, I kept feeling led to help others with spiritual things. I saw this modeled by others who were leading me. I thought I should prepare myself for this just like you would do for other jobs. I went to seminary and also put myself under mentors. Opportunities kept coming, and that has confirmed God’s call on my life.¹⁵

Denominational Leader

A16

Even when I was a pre-teen I found myself thinking about how our church could do things better. I loved ministry and around the age of 11 sensed a nudging by God toward a life of ministry. While I was a teen I pushed that nudge aside. My dad was a pastor, and I just pushed that away. Over time I just never could see myself doing anything else. No business or any job had the same draw. I am still excited years later and still think about ministry all the time.¹⁶

Seminary Director

A17

There was a process over time of realizing God’s call on my life. I was saved at a young age but never grew much and was not maturing spiritually. In college I became active at a local church. Through preaching I was hearing,

¹⁴ A14, interviewed by author, Watkinsville, GA, November 14, 2011.

¹⁵ A15, interviewed by author, Cleveland, TN, November 23, 2011.

¹⁶ A16, interviewed by author, Atlanta, GA, November 15, 2011.

discipleship, and relationships I started growing spiritually. My senior year I was headed to law school, and it occurred to me that I had never asked God what His will was for my life. I started praying and reading scripture with this thought on my mind. God spoke through his word, and I just began to talk out loud to others about this calling on my life to ministry.¹⁷

Missions Agency Director

A18

I was surrounded in my life with people that seemed to always be asking me good questions. When I was 17, a Christian guy a little older than I was would ask me things like “What is God doing in your life?” and “What does the future look like to you?” My friend would take me witnessing and to play basketball. He was in seminary, and he would just do life with me. After we would play ball he would then ask me these good questions. I was always being asked to do spiritual things. I also had this inner thirst for eternal things and a dis-satisfaction with jobs that did not impact eternity. There were milestone events like missionary speakers and youth retreats that God used to get my attention. I also really enjoyed serving the Lord. I would get this sense that I was made for serving Him. A final factor was the character of the lives I saw around me that were serving in ministry. I was attracted by their integrity. My life has just always been “tangled up with the Great Commission.”¹⁸

Para-church Ministers

A19

I was involved with a campus ministry as a college student. During my junior and senior years I was challenged to reproduce what I was experiencing in the lives of others. I was convicted by the Holy Spirit that I was doing a job of discipleship, but I was not clear on the motives. I started asking “Why am I doing this?” I prayed that God would give me the heart of the Apostle Paul for people. God began to answer that prayer, and I grew to love seeing lives changed. I had an engineering degree, but a mentor pointed out to me that my “discretionary time” was being given to ministry. He pointed out that “what you enjoy can inform your vocation.”¹⁹

¹⁷ A17, interviewed by author, Albany, NY, October 5, 2011.

¹⁸ A18, interviewed by author, Athens, GA, November 30, 2011.

¹⁹ A19, interviewed by author, Athens, GA, November 2, 2011.

A20

I was saved my freshman year in college. I later went on a summer mission project where I shared my faith each night. I loved the excitement of sharing the Gospel with others. I did not want to come in each evening. The activity of sharing the Gospel planted a seed of a life being called to ministry. Exposure to a campus ministry became directional to my life.²⁰

What role did your community of faith play in you recognizing your call?

Lead Pastors

A1

I was a part of a very large church. After services I would often approach my pastor and talk to him. He said later that he saw in me a hunger, a desire, and a willingness to take initiative. He invited me to an early morning class that he led for college students. He would listen to me talk and say on occasion that he saw in me things that God was going to use. He instilled hope and noted potential in me.

A2

While working a regular job, I would meet early and lift weights and exercise with a group of guys. We talked about doing a Bible study together. They said I had to lead the study. Something about that opportunity to lead did something in my heart about the impact I could have for the Lord. I later participated in a mission trip, and there was a requirement to prepare for the trip. God used that trip and service opportunity with my church to confirm my call.

A3

At the time I started sensing God's call, my community of faith was very moderate in their beliefs and had virtually no impact, it seemed, on my call or consideration of a call to ministry. In college I got involved with a campus ministry and started leading Bible studies. My leader told me to not wait on my church, but to just go with what God was doing in my life. This campus ministry fueled my call.

²⁰ A20, interviewed by author, Athens, GA, November 3, 2011.

A4

There were people involved all along the way. They were a sounding board for the questions I was having about ministry. Hearing their stories about God's call on their lives was also a catalyst to me thinking about ministry.

A5

My wife was teaching Sunday School, and she asked me to help. For three years I helped. I was exposed to ministry and leadership in this area of youth ministry. During these years I was asked by a pastor if I had considered ministry as a vocation. When I relocated, I was picked to lead and help with youth ministry. In another relocation I was asked to be an interim youth leader. These opportunities to lead and serve were used by God to show me he was up to something in leading me into ministry.

A6

At no time did my local church do anything to assist or help me progress or recognize God's call to ministry. I actually got poor counsel on pursuing ministry as a vocation. I grew up loving the Word and hearing the Word taught. Not until college did I get some guidance to go with what God was saying to me and to go and get prepared by attending seminary.

Associate Pastors and Ministry Directors

A7

In my church I kept finding myself as the spiritual leader for things. The pastor of my church came to my house when I was a teenager and attempted to get me to commit to ministry. I later did make this call public. After this I remembered a distinct time when my grandmother said to me as a small child "you ought to grow up and be a preacher like your granddaddy."

A8

Calling to ministry was raised often in our church as a viable option for a life work. Ministry as a vocation was accepted and celebrated.

A9

The opportunities to serve were big in my recognizing my call. In my Sunday School class, I was a table leader for discussion. I was asked to lead

in discipleship opportunities. I started attending a class taught by my pastor, and this was used to settle in my heart God's call.

A10

My church environment was huge. My pastor had a weekly class that served as sort of an incubator-type atmosphere for ministry. I was surrounded by guys in ministry that were models for me. Our church recognized ministry as an important call. Opportunities to lead, and also to fail, were provided.

A11

My church had a high priority on calling people to serve the Lord on the mission field. Also, I was given opportunities to serve and responsibility to carry out a ministry task. The particular man that spent a large amount of time with me had this expectation that if you knew Jesus, you would be serving and doing ministry. This mentality kept ministry always on my mind.

A12

My church seemed to recognize God's call on my life long before I did. My pastor, family, and leadership in the church fanned the flame for ministry. They asked me to do a concert for the whole church which served to greatly encourage me toward music as ministry.

A13

My local church was heavily involved in my call to ministry. They believed in me when it seemed like no one else did. They invited me to step into ministry opportunities. They asked me to do an internship and mentored me toward ministry.

A14

I kept hearing people say to me they saw something in my life that God was going to use. One person came up to me and asked if I had ever considered being an evangelist. I learned later that my grandmother had been praying for years for God work in my life related to a ministry calling.

A15

As a girl in ministry I was heavily influenced by my pastor's wife. Her heart softened my heart to the spiritual needs of the next generation. I noticed a need in my church on another occasion and took the initiative to address it and lead. Others affirmed my action and encouraged me by pointing out

ways God was using me. At times when I thought God was not blessing me, they would keep pointing out how He was working.

Denominational Leader

A16

The first thing I remember is a pastor that had a conversation with me. He said that God has His hand on me. Other pastors would ask if I ever felt called to vocational ministry. I did not feel pressured by these questions, but they were provocative.

Seminary Director

A17

My local church role was huge. At a time when I was growing spiritually, I was relying on interaction with my college pastor and my pastor. I set up a meeting with them to process what was going on in my life. I dreaded talking to my parents about what I was feeling. I knew they were expecting something related to law school. When my dad answered the phone, I just told him all about it and he replied, "I have told your mom for years you were going to be a preacher."

Missions Agency Director

A18

I was always involved in small churches growing up. People seemed to see their role as shaping and molding my character. They felt a freedom, and almost like a responsibility, to speak into my life. They would hold the bar high on my life and would coach me toward Godly character and state expectations for my life.

Para-church Ministers

A19

I was involved in a local church when I realized God was calling me to vocational ministry. However, the guys with a para-church ministry on campus were much more intentional in their involvement with my life. They took tremendous initiative in my life and really won me over to their passions. I wanted to duplicate what I had seen them do in my life. Their commitment to eternal things and their impact deeply affected my sense of call.

A20

My community of faith was the campus ministry I was a part of as a student. The guy that led me to Christ became my roommate and best man in my wedding. His passion for the lost was contagious. There did not seem to be churches in my community that had any fire to them. They were not missional other than in their giving.

What role has your community of faith played in your continuation in ministry?

Lead Pastors

A1

My home church was accessible if I needed them, but once I left for seminary I was not at the top of their priority list.

A2

Once my pastor learned that I was publicly acknowledging a call to ministry, he initiated some meetings. Before Wednesday night prayer meetings he would meet with a few guys and talk to us about ministry things like doing funerals, weddings, and how to put sermons together. The guys in the room would usually set the agenda, and he was more just available to answer questions.

A3

The campus ministry I was a part of really fueled my call. They pushed me spiritually and fostered my call. Every leader around me would keep reminding me I was called. They said they could see it.

A4

Between the time I said God was calling me out loud to others and going to seminary, I went through a time of running from God. Those in my church that were influencers in my life would get in my face and remind me of what God wanted to do with my life. Some came to me and sat me down and privately said get with what God is doing and stop running. Then when I decided to go to seminary, my home church paid for my first year. This was a great encouragement and gave me a sense of their support and made me accountable to them. They also increased their level of expectation, giving me more and more roles of service.

A5

They licensed me to ministry and then later ordained me. They wanted me to go and get training and encouraged me to come back and serve in the church. My influencers kept saying to remember, "The answer is 'yes Lord.' What's the question?" As I went about life, I continued to get word that they were praying for me and my family, and they blessed us again and again by checking on us.

A6

From age of 0 to 22, I do not remember one person that I wanted to be like spiritually. I was surrounded by negative examples in ministry. I had this call on my life, and I did not know what to do. Even when I was ordained, I did not know one single person on the ordaining board. Still to this day I can see the lack of involvement by others and lack of spiritual relationships in my church as a source of great discouragement throughout the time I served.

Associate Pastors and Ministry Directors

A7

My church began to give me opportunities to speak. About two months after a public statement of my call, my church licensed me, saying this was a preliminary step toward ordination. They said we can see God's call on your life. My pastor began to give me books, talk to me one-on-one about sermon preparation, and give me opportunities to preach. He would tell me to never turn down a chance to speak when asked.

A8

The biggest thing that happened was that an older teen began to disciple me when I was first showing leadership ability. He still serves as a source of accountability to me years later. My church family became a circle of relationships that was concerned about me and cared for me.

A9

Once I began to show interest in ministry, my pastor, though I was one of hundreds in the crowd, would often walk by me and ask if I was going on in the pursuit of ministry. These questions kept me thinking in the right direction.

A10

My home church paid for me to go to seminary. Later, the church I was a part of in college gave me an intern position. This created lots of responsibility and chances to serve.

A11

Early on, the encouragement by my pastor to be a reader really strengthened me. He would feed me books. My church environment during those days had a steady stream of missionaries and seminary professors up in front of the congregation. There were also men in my life that made me share my faith. God has placed older men in the church around me that really love the Lord and love ministry. This has kept me going.

A12

Whenever I had opportunities to sing and lead worship I would look up and someone from my home church would be there. This form of accountability kept me alert and spiritually disciplined. They were checking up on me and watching me.

A13

My youth pastor seemed like the one guy that just always believed in me. He would mention me to others, and I would hear him affirm me publicly. He gave me chances to lead, and when I failed, he would step in and guide me through my mistakes.

A14

My church family is a source of accountability and affirmation while I travel doing ministry. They provide financial backing. They offer a place of community for my family. They rebuke me and correct me when I am in the wrong.

A15

My church believed in me so much that they paid for my tuition for three years. The campus ministry I was a part of covered the cost of my books while I was in seminary. I received encouraging emails while preparing. My church took the initiative to stay in touch with me, making visits and offering their prayers.

Denominational Leader

A16

The affirmation I received from my church family and fellow believers has been huge in continuing on in ministry. I was encouraged to make a public statement about my call. When I did..., people would say to me they had known for years God was calling me. I was asked to serve as a part-time youth pastor. This gave me a chance to do ministry in a way that was like having training wheels on. They licensed me, and this was affirming. People would speak directly to me and say "you are called", and my own dad, who was a pastor once, told me I was the most passionate pastor he had been around.

Seminary Director

A17

The church I was in when I answered the call began to encourage me to get training and develop the gifts and talents God had given me. I was given opportunities to preach, teach, and develop small groups. My church bought me books and invested in tools for ministry for me to use.

Missions Agency Director

A18

I was given a tremendous amount of responsibility at an early age. After I was married, a family in the church took a deliberate interest in our life and call to missions. They would keep telling us they were with us. They would include us in their life and would pray with us. They presented themselves as partners with us. They commissioned us and sent us out.

Para-church Ministers

A19

There came a time when I was on the verge of saying God had not called me to ministry as a vocation. A spiritual leader in my life encouraged me by showing me where God had been using me and how God was using the gifts he had given to produce fruit in the lives of others. A pastor I had while serving on staff with a campus ministry was openly supportive of me and would give public affirmation. Another helpful experience was that the campus ministry I work with has a season of study they assign that helps settle, in a person's heart, God's call on their life.

A20

During my time as a campus minister, our ministry leadership has always had a team concept. This context of teamwork had helped me with vision and success. The church I am a part of now also supports our work, and this is affirming.

What things could a church family do to help others recognize and confirm the call to vocational ministry?

Lead Pastors

A1

Calling is not talked about much in the context where I serve. We have done some things to develop leadership, though, in our church. We initiated a process called the Leadership Development Program that focuses on individuals in their 20s in order to try and develop leaders for the next generation. It has the feel of an internship, but includes both responsibility for an area of ministry and opportunities to serve. They have authority to lead under the observation of other leaders. It is an environment where we manage the risks. People that first show interest and take initiative toward ministry are referred to this avenue for pursuing ministry leadership. A person can actually go to our web site and find information about this program and complete an application to participate.

A2

The biggest thing I see that needs to happen is to get people serving. Observe their service and have the point people for these areas of ministry offer affirmation and instruction.

In the preaching there should be a consistent calling out of the called. Then with those that respond, time needs to be given to those individuals to develop them.

A3

We are taking some intentional steps to help people with their call to ministry. I have a vision of seeing 200 to 300 students we have trained and sent out to do ministry as a vocation.

Our intended method is to create a housing situation where a couple of dozen people would live for three years while serving as an intern during their

college days. They would be offered classes of theological study and given areas of responsibility.

We should intentionally look for individuals that have been doing volunteer ministry already. Our eyes need to be open to those who show passion for God and seem to almost have a bent toward laying down their life for Christ.

The only way we can know this about a person is to spend time with them. We have to create an environment where we can get to know people.

A4

The leadership of the church has to see this as an aspect of discipleship. One-on-one efforts by the leadership of the church create the best opportunity for noticing, examining, and helping those being called.

A5

People can find themselves; they can find out who they are by serving. We need to get people in roles of service and help them to discover their gifts. The pastor needs to help people learn how to listen to the Holy Spirit. There should be opportunities for ministry leadership, and those in leadership roles should be aggressive in recruiting people to these areas.

A6

Everything about my personal experience with the church when I was discerning my call would be flipped upside down. Leaders in the church need to always be trolling for future leaders. Our roles in ministry should be carried out with the understanding that we are modeling for a future generation. Ministry needs to be communicated as a positive way to spend your life. Relationships between those leading and those being called are critical for longevity in ministry.

Associate Pastors and Ministry Directors

A7

We need to model with our lives a healthy and desirable picture of ministry. Offer opportunities for service. Help people serve in areas of their giftedness. Stay in touch with those showing a bent toward ministry, inviting them into your home, and taking them to share their faith with others. Give them a taste of ministry.

A8

People need to hear that being called to ministry is a viable option for life and also be taught what is meant by the concept of calling. When a church learns of someone answering the call, there should be an environment where that act of obedience is celebrated.

A9

One thing that I have seen modeled is the intentional looking by a church staff for those showing signs of calling to ministry. Under the leadership of the lead pastor, I noticed in staff meeting from time to time that he would ask all the staff to give him a list of names for people that they thought had potential for ministry as a vocation. The awareness of those around us that might be called seemed to create a culture of call. This kept the staff in a mode of “watching the room” for individuals with gifts and abilities for ministry.

Other things that a church can do is to get people in a place where they can taste the experience of God working through them in the life of another person. This happens by placing them in opportunities for service.

A10

First, I think much more needs to be done in churches with those that are young and are showing a heart for ministry. Providing practical ministry opportunities like summer internships and places of leadership will help people discover how God might use them. If a church sets up a way to invest financially in the lives of those going to seminary, this will communicate an importance for ministry to people in the crowd.

A11

The three things a church must do is to provide an avenue for people to have accountability, responsibility, and opportunity. All three of these then must be surrounded with encouragement. Internships are a great way to provide this environment.

A12

Regardless of the size of church, every church or pastor ought to be looking for “that kid.” This is the kid that people keep seeing as someone God has his hand on each time you cross paths with them. Every church seems to have “that kid.” These kids need to be noticed and surrounded with discipleship and an allowance of letting them be kids, but at the same time keeping before them the possibility of what God wants to do with their life.

A13

We cannot be shy about giving kids in their teens roles of leadership and service. When we notice a guy or girl who has leadership gifts we should give him or her leadership roles. We need to be intentional in discipling them toward a ministry role.

A14

Churches need to help people see that God is not looking for perfect people, but for available people. Help people to see that the gifts they have and the experiences they have can be used by God. Churches should consider how they can use the people God is sending their way, and not say to people “we will use you as long as you fit into our plans.”

A15

The biggest thing I would do is to get people praying together about the future and how God might use them. Look at ways to get older believers praying together with younger believers.

Denominational Leader

A16

A church needs to look for ways to be proactive in helping people recognize the call of God to vocational ministry. Several things I would suggest are giving an appeal during worship services to explore the call, offering a class for those interested in ministry, providing mentorships between a pastor and someone interested, setting up round-table discussions about ministry and see who shows up, giving people chances to preach, and regularly asking people to consider what God is saying to their life at that point in time.

Seminary Director

A17

As a seminary director I would suggest three things to pastors: Intentionally pray for God to call out ministers from among your church family; Preach on the call of God giving examples of varied ways that God can use people according to their giftedness; and create opportunities for them to be used when they respond.

Mission Agency Director

A18

The heart of the pastor is key for helping others recognize their call to vocational ministry. The pastor should lead the entire staff to be constantly taking someone with them in whatever role they are doing. Keep your eyes open to those around you that seem to be teachable. Don't be afraid to give people responsibility. Be willing to take some of the professionalism out of ministry tasks.

Para-church Ministers

A19

There must be a willingness of the church leadership to invest deeply in the lives of others. We have to operate from the standpoint that "more time spent with fewer equals greater impact for the Kingdom of God." A pastor has to be intentional in developing relationships with people.

A20

If a church is just thinking about what their church can do to reach their community there is not a mindset of others needing to answer the call to vocational ministry. When a church has the world on her heart, there is this call that weaves through the fabric that others are needed to complete the task. A consistent challenge to reach the world and a regular presentation of opportunities for the church body to be involved in meeting those needs will lead to people responding and going. When people go out, they need to know ahead of time that they will be supported through prayer, partnership, and finances. Finally, a church should be willing to recruit those they think are leaders to go and take responsibility for ministry.

The second group of interviews completed for this project include five ministers who currently or previously served as a lead pastor over a number of years. Some details of their environment of service are provided prior to their answers in order to give some background and understanding of why they answer in the fashion in which they did. For example, the size of church a person pastored will certainly have an impact on the potential numbers of people who might respond

to a call to vocational ministry. As stated previously, these pastors are referenced as B1, B2, etc.

Background of Influencers

B1

This pastor has served his current congregation for more than thirty years and has a regular weekly worship attendance of over 1,000. The church is located in a college community, and the church actively reaches many of those students as well as having strong and vibrant youth ministries.²¹

B2

This pastor has served his current congregation for more than thirty years and has a regular worship attendance each week of more than 1,000. The church is located in a college community. The church has gone through a relocation that moved their meeting place several miles away from the college. They have acquired space near the campus in order to have a presence among students during the week.²²

B3

This pastor served as the lead pastor of one church for almost twenty years. He currently serves as an associate pastor responsible for discipleship. The church he pastored grew to an attendance that exceeded 1,400 week to week. The church family was made up mostly of worshipers ages 30 to 45.²³

²¹ B1, interviewed by author, Auburn, AL, September 2, 2011.

²² B2, interviewed by author, Watkinsville, GA, November 8, 2011.

²³ B3, interviewed by author, Athens, GA, December 1, 2011.

B4

This pastor served as a pastor for more than twenty years in three different states. The church sizes were all fewer than 500 weekly. He currently serves as a missions director for a denominational region.²⁴

B5

This pastor served for thirty-three years as the Lead Pastor of one church. The church was in a growing community of young families and grew to a regular weekly attendance of 4,000.²⁵

Interviews with Influencers

What role did the local church play in your call to ministry?

B1

I was a part of a small church where everyone knew me. Routinely the pastor and my Sunday School teachers would say to me, "What seminary are you going to go to?" and "You are going to be a preacher one day." All my youth years I was convinced that I was going to law school and that I would be a senator. My parents never mentioned calling or pastoring to me. However, after making my call public, I learned that they had prayed for three decades for a son that would be a preacher.

During high school I was given opportunities to speak at times on Sunday nights and on Youth Sunday. Two weeks after my answering the call publicly, my pastor ask me to preach, and I still remember that a lady was saved that day.

B2

After I umpired a church league softball game when I was a young kid, one of the men came up to me and invited me to church. I started attending. While I was involved there, my pastor came to my house and challenged me to step up and live for the Lord. He sensed in me a calling from God long before I knew it. He would invite me to go visiting with him. He gave me

²⁴ B4, interviewed by author, Athens, GA, December 1, 2011.

²⁵ B5, interviewed by author, Atlanta, GA, January 9, 2012.

opportunities to serve and to speak. He was very honest with me, actually rebuking me from time to time about things in my life.

The church where I was attending had lots of people that were called to ministry. Our pastor would bring guest preachers in, and after they preached, he would bring those of us that were called (in his opinion) around those guest speakers. He would have us pick them up at their motels, drive them around, and assist them with their needs. I had lots of exposure to ministry. With all of this exposure, one thing led to another, and I actually started pastoring when I was in college.

B3

During my college years my pastor was a great model and advocate for ministry. His preaching and ministry was powerful and effective. Being in a healthy church was inspiring and made me want more of that atmosphere. I was able to see church life and ministry as something very attractive.

While serving on a summer beach project, I saw God working in my life and really sensed God confirming His call on my life. During those days my pastor met with me and some others regularly to talk about ministry. I was later licensed to preach as a college student, and this formed a level of accountability that kept me focused.

B4

Growing up, I was very involved in a small local church. Seems like they were constantly leading me along in what God was doing in my life. While attending a youth conference I responded publicly saying that God was calling me to a life of service, but I was not sure what that was. I shared this experience publicly with my home church the next Sunday. From that point I had several conversations with my pastor, who helped me process through this search for what God wanted. He began to give me opportunities to lead Wednesday night prayer meetings and do devotionals for the church family.

Once he gave my name to a church that needed a youth speaker for an event. He worked with me on preparing my sermon. The affirmation I received from my church became huge in my pressing on toward this call to ministry.

B5

My parents and my local church were very instrumental in me answering God's call to vocational ministry. My parents were always going to church and serving in various ways. Whatever they were involved with, I was involved as well. This really introduced me to the local church and created a great love for her. During my teenage years our church called a new and

young pastor. He was different to me than the others and I believe this was because he took so much interest in the youth of the church. He would spend lots of time with me, asking me questions about life and what God was doing in my life. I was attracted to the work he was doing. I was headed toward a life in law enforcement but I just could never get away from my love for the ministry and God's work. His passion for ministry was contagious.

How many people are currently serving in ministry that came through your ministry?

B1

I keep a record of their names and addresses and where they are serving. There are more than 200 men and women on that list.

B2

I never really sat down and counted, but I think somewhere close to 100. I still meet people from time to time who tell me they were called to vocational ministry under my pastorate and I have never met them before that conversation.

B3

Two, who immediately stand out. One is a missionary in Asia. He was saved at the church, and now he and his wife, along with their five children, serve overseas. The other was a college student who is now a pastor.

B4

I know of one man who was a deacon in a church I pastored, and today he is a pastor in Oklahoma. There is also another family that left our church, went to seminary, and now pastors in Missouri.

B5

I have spent some time recently attempting to come up with that number. I want to be conservative in estimating but the best I can tell there are at least thirty people serving today in some kind of vocational way. There was a time when at least twelve people were on our church staff that had been called out of our own church family.

In what ways were/are people presented with the possibility of answering the call?

B1

Very seldom is this presented to the congregation. Very few times have I extended the call to preach but when I do I usually am calling people to consider serving God on the mission field. I have tried not to call people myself.

B2

In our preaching we raise the possibility, and if someone shows an interest we have staff follow up on those conversations. In the past I took people with me a lot when I would do ministry. When I have special guests in to speak I try to include young guys and give them a chance to be around them.

B3

My big regret is that I never did extend the call that often. I just never went at it very intentionally. The only thing I really did was when I spoke to college students I would challenge them to make decisions based on eternal impact.

B4

I probably did not extend the opportunity to respond to God's call to ministry enough. I actually do remember a specific invitation, just on impulse from God, while on a mission trip that four of the 11 people on the trip said they believed God was calling them. One couple from that trip is now leading a church in Missouri.

B5

Constantly, in my preaching, I would raise the possibility before people that God may be calling them to a life of vocational ministry. We would have retreats and conferences for different ages and we would often have one of the breakout sessions that would deal with the subject of calling. A really big thing we did as a church staff was to stress over and over before our people that our doors were always open for conversations about the call to ministry. Many would come and talk about the subject and a few would eventually answer God's call and many others would go in a different direction.

What informal things about the environment of your community of faith promote the recognition of a call to ministry?

B1

In an unintentional way, the health of our church and the style of expository preaching are the two things that have most contributed to people responding.

B2

We have an atmosphere of calling. We remind people they can be called, and we are accessible to people if they want to have those conversations.

B3

Once, when someone mentioned to me they were interested in ministry, I invited him to come and live with me for a week. He shadowed me in everything I did as a pastor. Maybe this kind of accessibility was important.

B4

Just an attempt to be real and transparent with people was the informal thing that promoted what ministry really is. I attempted to let people see me living a life of vulnerability.

B5

We celebrated people's call to ministry in front of people and with the person answering the call. There seemed to be a very open atmosphere to the idea of talking about a call to ministry. People sensed a freedom to explore the call to ministry without feeling pressured to go in that direction. They could go in a different direction and not feel guilty.

Another aspect was our decision to do so much of our church ministry with a missional mindset. Our DNA was a church that was on mission, whether doing a retreat or a gathering for fun there was a purpose in mind. This kept people thinking that God wanted to use them in the world around them.

What formal ways does the church you serve promote, recognize, and encourage those answering the call?

B1

There are a number of things going on in the life of our church that help people consider and discern a call to ministry. The number one thing is that, for more than two decades, I have offered an early morning, once-a-week meeting for those interested in ministry. We talk about an issue the first half hour and discuss a book the second hour. When I hear of someone interested in ministry, I meet with him or her and go over 12 to 15 things he or she can do as a next step. I provide resources to people considering the call. We also offer internships that include seminary training. For those that go away to seminary, the church pays for me to make annual visits to those students (if three or more are at any one school). Each year I host a reunion for those out of our church who are serving in vocational ministry. Routinely, about once a month, I have people come and visit me for a few hours and just talk about ministry and what is going on in their life.

B2

I keep my eyes and ears open, looking and listening for clues that someone is ministry-oriented. We offer a training institute for ministers to get further training. We also take steps to license and ordain people as that comes up in their ministry journey.

B3

I developed a notebook of articles and put together a class that would meet once a month with anyone interested in ministry. This was referred to as the "call waiting" class. I took people to leadership training conferences. I gave individuals opportunities to speak when they demonstrated an interest in ministry. We offered classes to help people identify their spiritual gifts in an effort to get them in the right places of service.

B4

I never offered anything formal that would promote people recognizing a call to ministry. I see the importance of this now, but I never really gave it much thought while pastoring.

B5

We kept our ears and eyes open for people that were showing signs of God's activity in their life and for taking initiative in ministry. The invitation was given to these individuals to partner with a staff member long term. These

individuals were also asked to take on roles of ministry within our church in a staff level position. We hired many people right out of our church family to fill these vocational ministry positions. We offered leadership training classes and internships for students. We also took people that were talking about ministry and gave them opportunities to lead and serve. This responsibility would often be the environment where they settled with confidence their call to ministry.

As stated in Chapter 1, this author believes that the local church and its leaders play a role in helping a person recognize and confirm his call to ministry. A general overview of the twenty-five interviews contained here in Chapter four strongly supports this conviction. As each person spoke of his or her own call to ministry, he or she consistently pointed to the presence of, or the need for, assistance in the discernment process as well as affirmation from those observing their life. Also, in those instances where influencers were intentional in their approach to calling out the called the number of people entering ministry as a vocation were dramatically greater than those who were less focused on this aspect of discipleship.

In what ways did those answering the call experience outward involvement and assistance in the discernment process? What ways do they suggest for improving the discernment process? In what ways did those in a position of leadership effectively assist those discerning the call to vocational ministry? The most noteworthy ways contained in these interviews will be summarized and analyzed in Chapter 5. From that summary a plan for helping people discern his or her call to ministry as a vocation will be presented.

CHAPTER 5

OUTCOMES

Building upon the instruction given in Scripture, ideas gained from the literature review, and information learned in the personal interviews, a plan for helping people discern their call to vocational ministry will now be developed for the environments of Watkinsville First Baptist. This plan will be initiated by the pastor and communicated to the spiritual leadership of the church family. The goal of this plan is to better assist individuals in recognizing and confirming their call to ministry. Considering the enormous needs of our world for laborers in the harvest, perhaps, many more people will respond with confidence and assurance to God's call to vocational ministry than would have without this intentional approach.

Before the presentation of this plan for discerning ministry as a vocation, some analysis and summarization of the two different sets of interviews described in Chapter 4 are in order. First, what noteworthy ways did those serving in ministry experience outward involvement in their discernment process? Whether these characteristics would stretch across various geographical regions or different cultures is unknown. However, in light of this body of research, the writer has conceived four words which summarize the outward and public involvement experienced by those attempting to discern their call: Intentionality, Opportunity, Accessibility, and Affirmation.

Intentionality

Someone took some initiative in each of the interviewees' life. (Even interview A6, who saw no church involvement, saw his mother go and talk to his

pastor about the call.) Someone was watching these persons, noticing them, setting an example, and in some cases actually confronting them about what he or she saw God doing in their life. Several of the interviewees mentioned learning that someone had been praying for them regarding ministry. More than one had people bring up God's call being on their life before any inward thoughts of such had occurred. Others acknowledged hearing, seeing, and experiencing an environment where answering a call to vocational ministry was raised as a possibility and even celebrated. In those cases involving para-church ministers, a person can recognize that intentionally reproducing future leaders is in their DNA as ministers.

Opportunity

The most common denominator in all the interviews was the opportunity to serve and lead in an area of ministry. The taste of ministry created a thirst and hunger for more opportunities. This was the chance for them to glimpse at what God could do with their life and how their spiritual gifts could be used.

Accessibility

Those discerning their call to vocational ministry spoke of leaders and pastors being accessible to them. They were not ignored or forgotten when they began to demonstrate signs of God's activity in their life. Those ministering over them were available through classes, informal conversations, formal appointments, and weekly accountability and discipleship.

Affirmation

The cement that offered a settled foundation regarding call was the repeated ways that others affirmed God's hand on their life. This ranged from casual

comments to build the person up to formal and public ceremonies like licensing and ordination.

Reviewing the interviews of those serving as influencers in the lives of others allowed examination of the question: what ways were influencers involved in people discerning the call to vocational ministry? The major contributors to their influence turn out to be no different than what the twenty randomly selected ministers in category A experienced: Intentionality, Opportunity, Accessibility, and Affirmation. Notice the formal and informal environments created by the pastors and their churches.

Intentionality

The more intentional a pastor is in recognizing and assisting those around him whom God may be calling, the larger the number of public responses to the call of vocational ministry. Actions such as prayer, ministry classes, extending a public call to respond, direct conversations about ministry, and mentor relationship-building are all facets of the intentional pastor. Those pastors that saw larger numbers of people obeying God's call operated with eyes wide open, looking for those that God was calling.

Opportunity

When a pastor noticed someone interested in ministry or someone taking unusual initiative toward ministry, he was quick to connect those individuals with more responsibility and additional opportunities for service. Some opportunities were actually created to give people the chance to explore the use of their spiritual gifts and to discern if God was calling them. Some common opportunities presented

were internships, preaching or teaching, leadership of a specific ministry program, and mission trip experiences.

Accessibility

The intentional pastors were very relational. Those exploring the call had access to them. There were open-door policies extended to those exploring the call. Their homes were open, and their ministry routines often included a mentoree.

Affirmation

As people dealt inwardly and privately with their call, as they served in various ministry areas, and as they explored openly what God's plan was for their future, outward comments of appreciation and commendation by influencers often served to spur people on in their search. This acknowledgement and assessment by influencers weighs heavy on the hearts of those they lead.

The actions of giving people who were exploring the call increased levels of ministry responsibility served as an initial form of affirmation. In some cases volunteers in ministry areas were actually hired by the churches they were serving, providing another form of affirmation. Opportunities for the church body to celebrate publicly those obeying the call were presented, allowing a person to feel the affirmation of an entire church body. The licensing of preachers and ordaining of ministers also served as a formal way for the church leadership to officially affirm those called.

Two subtle contributors to a noticeably large number of people responding to a call to vocational ministry should be highlighted at this time—location and longevity. Interviews with B1, B2, and B3 raise these subtleties.

Interviews B1 and B2 indicate between them as many as 300 people may be in ministry today. Both are pastors serving in separate college towns. Just the nature of their location, suggest the number of people responding to God's call will be higher in number in areas that are saturated with those making life direction decisions like college students than in areas where those life decisions are generally settled. Both pastors lead churches that have had strong college ministries through the years. The college days, far more than other life stages, are critical times in the process of a person making life-direction choices. It should be noted having observed other churches in the same areas that not all churches in those towns can give the same testimony of comparable numbers. However, combining the four major contributors with a community of believers ripe for deciding about their future obviously has an impact on the number of people responding.

Factor in the interview with B5. All four contributors were obvious in this pastor's environment, especially intentionality. However, over the course of thirty-three years of ministry for this pastor, far fewer have responded to a call to vocational ministry in his church which is not in a college town than in the two churches located in college towns (30 verses 200 at one location and 100 at the other). This does not mean that one place is more important than another but does point out the critical need for pastors in college-like towns to be aware of the potential of their influence.

The second subtle contributor to higher numbers answering the call to vocational ministry under the influence of these pastors, suggested by this body of research, is longevity. Three of the five pastors interviewed served their

congregations for more than thirty years. The longevity of these pastors gave them the opportunity to observe the lives of those in their care as well as time to build trust in relationships. Both of these factors are ingredients that came out as important in the discernment process of category A interviews. They were often, though not always, attracted to the ministry by a love for their current spiritual environment and their respect for their pastor's influence and impact. They also made reference to people knowing them and seeing in them gifts and potential for ministry. These kinds of traits in relationships do not usually develop in situations of short leadership tenure.

Having acknowledged the importance of the influencers, the one overarching characteristic that describes the places where people are responding in unusually large numbers compared to other places is awareness. That is, awareness by the spiritual leadership of the church of both the instruction of Scripture to be intentional in helping with the discernment process and the indicators in a person's life of God calling people.

Where pastors are aware of and obedient to the scriptural instruction to pray for laborers, as stated in Matthew and Paul's admonition to Timothy to teach what he has learned to those who will be able to teach others, men and women are responding obediently to God's call on their life. Where pastors are aware that people in their congregations are dealing inwardly and privately with God's will for their life related to vocational ministry, outward and public conversations regarding the call of God are taking place. Where pastors are aware that God uses them to

affirm and confirm other's call to vocational ministry, men and women are answering God's call with confidence.

Concluding Plan

As a reminder from the introductory chapter, Watkinsville First Baptist is a church in a college community. The opportunity to have an impact on future generations in this type location is enormous (as proved by interviews with B1 and B2).

Knowing that there is an *inward* and *private* aspect to the call, as discussed in the literature review, what does this project's research offer as far as ingredients for a plan to be at our best with the *outward* and *public* aspect of call discernment? The answer to that question is a plan that will be referred to as the Discerning Ministry as a Vocation Process, or, in short—the DMAV Process.

The DMAV Process title itself reflects what many of those interviewed referred to in discerning their call, "It was a process." A process takes time, time for praying, waiting, experiencing, and deciding. This has to be a careful process of discernment where men and women are given the freedom to explore the call with assistance and counsel without being pressured to answer a call that was never intended for them.

The DMAV Process will be WFBC's attempt to assist men and women in the effort of recognizing whether or not God is calling him or her to a life of vocational ministry. The DMAV Process will seek to create an informal environment that raises the possibility a person should consider giving time to explore God's call to vocational ministry when considering other life options. The process will also be

supported by intentional and formal actions by the spiritual leadership of the church to help a person recognize God's call, and in doing so, experience affirmation leading to confirmation openly and confidently.

The DMAV Process will be organized around the four outward contributors discovered in the research, each tethered by specific actions by the spiritual leadership of WFBC. These four outward contributors, and the actions associated with each, will work together to fuel an awareness by the church leadership and all church members that God is still active in calling out people who will obediently serve him in vocational ministry. The four contributors and supporting actions are listed as follows.

Intentionality

1. The Lead Pastor will teach, annually, to the spiritual leadership of the church, the Biblical instruction regarding our role of outward involvement in a person recognizing his or her call to vocational ministry.
2. All pastoral staff will be required to read or reread a book on calling each year.
3. Staff meetings and Deacon's meetings will include times of prayer for God to call out laborers for the harvest from among the church family.
4. Each pastor will have a job description that includes the requirement to have a "Timothy", or mentoree, along-side him doing ministry with the expectation that that person will one day lead in a ministry area.
5. Staff meetings will often include a time of public naming of those in the congregation that seem to be showing potential for ministry leadership to create a watch list for prayer and service.
6. The church office will keep free copies of books related to calling to give to those that inquire about ministry or those that the Staff believe may benefit from its reading.

7. Sermons will be preached that educate the church on what calling means, teach how to support those God is calling, and raise the possibility of God calling some to serve him in vocational ministry.
8. The weekly sermon response card will have a place to indicate a person's desire to talk with someone about God's calling in his or her life.
9. The church web-site will include a page identified as DMAV in order to allow people to explore the call and to understand what is available in the life of WFBC to help them recognize if God is calling them to serve vocationally. Links to sites that give an on-line environment for exploring the call will be provided here. Links will also be provided for intensive programs for discerning the call outside of the local body, such as the Compass program at Gordon-Conwell.
10. Regular church communication pieces will have information about scheduled DMAV activities.
11. Those serving as ministry interns will be listed by name in church listings along-side other staff members raising awareness of the process and opportunities to serve.
12. Video testimonies of those who have obediently answered God's call and the process they went through will be shown to the church family occasionally and posted on the church website.

Opportunities

1. The importance of serving *where a person is*, in areas where there are needs, will be communicated regularly to the church family.
2. Mission trips involving different tasks and including multiple geographic locations will be offered each year. Included in these trips will be conversations about the possibility God may be leading those participating to an increasing level of involvement with missions.
3. Internships will be offered for men and women that rotate them to different areas of service in the church program, allowing for exposure to various ways God may use them and the discovery of their spiritual gifts.
4. Internships will be offered in specific areas of ministry for the entire internship for those more definite on their direction of interests.
5. Corporate worship services will be scheduled giving those exploring the call opportunities to preach, teach, and lead in ministry areas.

6. Those displaying gifts for ministry and initiative will be pressed to take on heavier responsibility in ministry leadership roles.

Accessibility

1. The staff will communicate they have an open-door policy for those that desire to discuss ministry calling.
2. The Lead Pastor will conduct a weekly class for those interested in ministry as a vocation, discussing material directly related to the work of ministry.
3. An annual retreat focused on exploring God's call will be hosted by WFBC and offered to the college community as a whole, as well as anyone interested from other churches in the area.
4. Directly following the sermon series related to the call to ministry, round-table discussions will be advertised and hosted to, among other things, connect those interested in ministry exploration to opportunities available at WFBC.
5. When guest speakers or missionaries are present for church services, they will be made available for conversation with the church family, creating an opportunity for people to learn more about how that person began doing what he or she does.

Affirmation

1. The pastoral staff will be coached to give open, honest, and deliberate feedback to those serving in their ministry areas.
2. Declaring publicly, in some setting, the belief that God is calling a person to vocational ministry will be encouraged and expected allowing opportunity for people to celebrate and express support.
3. A seminary support fund will be established to assist those attempting to train and prepare for vocational ministry.
4. The pastoral staff will plan to visit the seminary or setting of ministry where those called out of the church are training and serving.
5. A log will be kept by WFBC of those serving in ministry in order to continue contact annually and for the purpose of prayer.
6. An annual retreat will be hosted for ministry alumni to return home and report and receive encouragement.

7. Public and formal action will be taken by the church to affirm those that are believed to possess God's call to vocational ministry. Upon a church member's public statement of obeying God's call and the church leadership having ample opportunity to witness the activity of God in his or her life, he or she will be presented with a Ministry Affirmation Covenant expressing the support and endorsement of the church family.

Preliminary Results

As stated in chapter one, the scope and time-frame of this project does not allow a statistical analysis proving numbers increase (of people answering the call to vocational ministry) as a result of an intentional approach like the DMAV Process. However, WFBC will track and evaluate the process over time. An intentional approach as described in this chapter will require a large investment of time and money resources. If the numbers of people serving in vocational ministry from WFBC do not appear to increase as compared to prior years before this plan, then those resources certainly need to be allocated to other areas.

How long should the initial evaluation time be? The author believes a four year time frame of focused evaluation would be required in order to determine a true picture of the success of the DMAV process. This time is subjective but this coincides with the time frame of a segment of life that populates the ministry field of WFBC. Four years relates to a college student doing four years of college. For example, if a senior in college makes a discerning choice toward vocational ministry this year, the staff at WFBC would be able to track with that student through a one year internship and a three year seminary program on into a first assignment in vocational ministry.

In order to track those that participate and benefit from an intentional approach to the discernment process the pastoral staff will be coached to use a systematic record system that allows for consistent and regular follow-up. An unwritten rule around the atmosphere of WFBC is “our mission is what we measure.” Therefore, if our mission is to help people discern whether God is calling them to vocational ministry and to walk with them to the point of training for ministry this will require accurate and centralized record keeping.

Record keeping for the DMAV Process will include numbers correlating to four areas in the discernment process—those exploring the call, those who have publicly acknowledged God’s call on their life, those pursuing training for vocational ministry, and those serving in vocational ministry that were connected to the life and ministry of WFBC. These numbers will be collected from pastoral record keeping generated from conversations with those dealing with God’s call. These numbers should give a strong indicator positively or negatively whether the DMAV Process is affecting the increase of individuals recognizing and obeying His call.

Beginning with the fall of 2012 each of the six pastoral staff members at WFBC will be trained to complete a “DMAV Connection Card” for those they are in contact with that are demonstrating vocational ministry potential. This information will be placed in the care of the senior pastor’s office. Staff meetings and staff evaluations will afford the senior pastor opportunity to follow-up with those staff members in regards to those they see walking through the discernment process. Also, with the DMAV Connection Card in hand, those registered will be included in routine follow-up throughout the year.

Some early indicators point to positive results just during the time period this project has been researched and written.

From the perspective of the author of this project, who is also the Lead Pastor of WFBC, the immersion into this subject material has already begun to weave itself into the heart of the church. Awareness by the pastoral staff is at a higher level than in years past, and several stories confirm the early impact of this project.

Four years ago this author began to pray for God to give him someone to pour life into, someone to be his “Timothy” in ministry. The following Sunday after specifically praying that prayer, a young man walked up to the author after the worship service and asked for an appointment. Before the handshake was over the author recognized God had answered his prayer. That initial meeting led to a series of weekly meetings. Those weekly meeting led to an internship. Today, he has completed seminary and is serving in Rome, Italy, as a missionary with the International Mission Board.

When he left for seminary, this author prayed again for God to give him a guy to pour life into whose goal was ministry. That next Sunday, a gentleman walked up to the author and said, “I want to introduce you this week to a friend of mine who believes God may be calling him to pastor.” The author met the young man, and for the past two years they have met each Wednesday for lunch, reading books together about ministry and talking about what the life of a pastor is like. He is visiting seminaries now and plans to do an internship with WFBC next year.

In the Fall of 2011, this author preached a sermon on the subject of being called to vocational ministry. Those in attendance were given the chance at the close of the service to indicate on a response card their desire to have a conversation with someone about a call to ministry. Thirty-four people indicated the desire to talk further. Those thirty-four were invited to dinner the next week where they talked about what to do while you are in the discerning process. Eighteen attended and now twelve of those are meeting each Thursday morning, 6:30-7:30 AM, talking with the author about ministry.

For five years WFBC has owned a house next door to the church property. Since fall of 2011, it has been used to host ministry events. At that time four college guys were invited to live in the house, with the agreement they would give 15 hours per week of ministry service to the church. They are WFBC's first set of interns, and the first of those young men has just taken a position as Youth Pastor at a church across town.

One of the books discovered doing research on this project related to calling has now become a staple in conversations with those exploring the call. The book, *Is God Calling You*, by Jeff Iorg, was required reading in 2011 for our Deacons. The time of reading the book dove-tailed with a time when our church was asked to consider one of our own as the new WFBC Children's Pastor. Through reading this book, our Deacons were better able to recognize the call of God on this man's life and led to an unanimous vote by our church to bring him on staff. One of those Deacons, as well, further nailed down his own call to international mission service after our book study.

These stories are indicators that the open conversations about calling among our church family are producing a harvest that was not seen during the years prior to this study. The river of students is flowing through WFBC. Students, and even young families, are publicly exploring the call of God. The intentional awareness that God wants us to pray for laborers and to teach those that can teach others is leading to more and more people from our congregation discovering the joy of knowing God's plan for their life. Like never before, we are motivated to be watchful of those around us, in lock-step with them seeing and affirming the evidence of God's call to vocational ministry at the same time he or she is hearing God's call.

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VITA

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Sibley's first place of service, after completion of his Masters in 1992, was pastor of Macedonia Baptist Church in Cleveland, Tennessee. After serving there for eight years he began serving in the fall of 2000 as senior pastor of Watkinsville First Baptist in Watkinsville, Georgia.

Sibley married the former Carla Wilson in 1990. They have three sons, Graham, Conner, and Wilson and two daughters, Madison and Cheney.